

choice



Paws for thought

Issues of ethical ownership
— pedigree or designer,
pet shop or rescue.



Next G

We look at Telstra's claims
about the network, as well
as the latest handsets.

On test

- + 80cm televisions
- + Camcorders
- + Small BBQs
- + Kitchen scales
- + Rechargeable batteries
- + Oven cleaners

DECEMBER 2008/JANUARY 2009 WWW.CHOICE.COM.AU

Shonky Awards

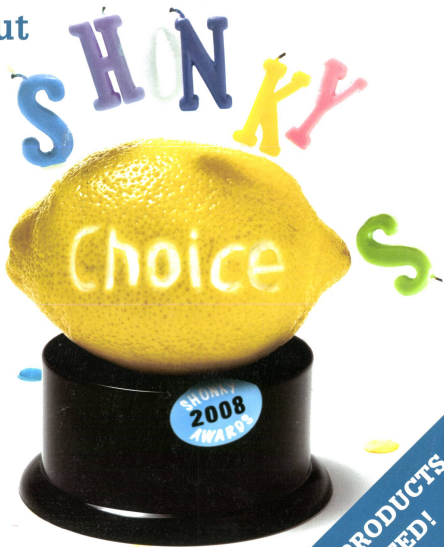
See who takes out
our infamous
honours

Is a First Home Saver
Account right for you?

Our guide to a socially
responsible Christmas

Putting 'food miles'
into perspective

Extended warranties –
do you or don't you?

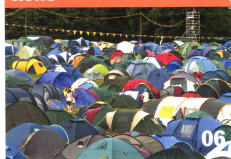


160 PRODUCTS
RATED!

Experts rank 68 sparkling whites, reds and rosés to bring you the CHOICE Selection in time for Christmas

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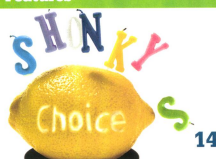
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Email ausconsumer@choice.com.au

"CHOICE it" before you buy it

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. Because we pay full price for the products we test, we can remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry – our only aim is to give consumers the best possible information about buying products and services. Our income is only from subscriptions to our magazines and choice.com.au, and from other services we supply for the benefit of consumers. We're not a government body and we don't receive government funding.

We have laboratories in Marrickville, Sydney, that test everything from juicers to plasma TVs, coffee grinders to MP3 players and air conditioners. We test hundreds of products every year. There's no hidden agenda to our testing – we simply road-test products so that consumers like you don't get ripped off. CHOICE ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys.

CHOICE also has staff who research a wide range of consumer services – everything from the financial industry to the organic food business, supermarket practices to drug companies and pharmacies. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

CHOICE has also always campaigned about consumer goods and services that affect your life. We lobby government and regulators on behalf of all consumers in Australia. CHOICE was established in 1959 and is a not-for-profit, non-party-political organisation.

BEST BUY

CHOICE Best Buy CHOICE calls a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Best Buys.

GREEN BUY

CHOICE Green Buy CHOICE calls a product a Green Buy if it delivers both good quality and environmental performance at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Green Buys.



CHOICE Video When you see the CHOICE Video icon, you can find more information about that story at choice.com.au.

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For subscription and renewal enquiries only, call 1800 069 552

CHOICE Shopper

Call 1300 360 655. All you need is the model name and number of the product you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number. CHOICE Shopper is available to personal subscribers only.



KITCHEN SCALES
PAGE 53

On test

- 42 + 80cm televisions** Don't spend up big on a high-resolution model until you read our surprising results.
- 46 + Camcorders** Back up your precious digital memories.
- 50 + Small barbecues** Bigger doesn't always mean better – we show you why.
- 53 + Kitchen scales** Electronic or mechanical? We put both to the test.
- 56 + Rechargeable batteries** The best batteries for all your Christmas gifts and gadgets.
- 58 + Oven cleaners** Is there a natural alternative that's just as effective?



Comment

More to cheer about this Christmas



For many of us, the holiday season – the undisputed busiest shopping season of the year – is met with a mix of excitement and trepidation. As advertisers go into overdrive, you can “CHOICE it” before you buy it. We’re an antidote to the overwhelming chorus urging you

to spend first and ask questions later.

CHOICE has been busy campaigning hard all year for significant, consumer-driven improvements to the way business is done, and we’re pleased to share the gains.

Firstly, as you’re shopping for your holiday feast you may notice a new price indicator on grocery products: one that breaks down the cost of packaged food per unit – say \$3.09 per 100g of coffee – so you can spot the best value product at a glance. This is a win that came out of years of lobbying and CHOICE’s representations to the government’s Grocery Prices Inquiry. It’s still early days as stores trial different unit-pricing schemes, but CHOICE is keen to ensure the best model becomes national practice.

Now, if you’re giving your credit card a workout over Christmas you’ll be comforted to know that CHOICE continues to lead the charge for lenders to pass on interest rate cuts – both on credit cards and home mortgages. CHOICE helped shame defiant lenders into passing on the first round of rate cuts after we calculated the cost of their greed at \$2 million a day for home buyers nationwide.

You may also be one of many Australians who uses this time of year to contribute to their chosen charities. This year, CHOICE published a groundbreaking report about transparency in charitable donations. Now the senate is investigating ways to improve transparency and ensure donations reach their cause.

Finally, CHOICE’s GreenWatch campaign continues to expose bogus environmental claims, making it easier for you to reward genuine green innovation instead of “greenwash”. Our efforts have already led to a number of successful actions by the ACCC, and inside this issue you’ll find a savvy consumer’s guide to having a more environmentally friendly Christmas. ■

Anny Friis
Editorial Director

CHOICE Annual Review 2007-08

For the first time, CHOICE has compiled all our yearly activities into one easy to read review. It covers our lab and product testing work, research and information department, our presence in the media, marketing highs and lows and our campaigning successes. Read it at www.choice.com.au/annualreview.

ENERGY SWITCHING



Introducing CHOICE's new energy switching service

CHOICE Switch is an online service that can make cutting energy costs easy.

Increasing costs have Australians looking for ways to save money and with changes to the energy sector, electricity and gas bills are now a good way to curb unnecessary spending. In many areas you're no longer obliged to stay with your original energy provider and can opt to use another retailer at any time. This is welcome news as energy price rises last January reached 17% in some towns and cities, placing many families under extra financial burden.

Online services have sprung up in Australia and elsewhere, helping dissatisfied customers make the switch with ease. The good news is that CHOICE will now offer this service, while also helping you make the most informed decision possible. CHOICE Switch is a partnership between CHOICE and uSwitch, to provide you with a quick and easy way to compare retailers based on an estimation of current information. You will also be able to access information on consumer protection, plans, rates and green energy on the website.

CHOICE Switch is free for consumers, and independent of energy companies. It offers instant price comparisons so you can see savings at a glance. Full switching is available in some states and is gradually being phased in in others. For the switching service, the provider pays CHOICE Switch a fee – a flat rate of \$65 for electricity, \$25 for gas and \$90 for both. Switching is simple and safe – when you change providers, your electricity and gas

supply stays the same, only the company and price will alter.

As the energy market changes in most states, retailers are competing for business. It's not easy to wrap your head around technical jargon and the difference between providers and plans can be daunting.

The CHOICE Switch website provides tips on how to make a smart switch and avoid overswitching, which can have its downsides too. CHOICE spokesman Christopher Zinn says the growth of comparison tools and websites is of great benefit to consumers. "It provides exposure to what's out there in the market, which hasn't been readily at hand before."

CHOICE Switch can not only save you money, but is a good way to search for a more climate-friendly source of energy. Consumer energy consumption is a significant reason our energy greenhouse gas emissions are at a standstill, according to the government report *Energy Use in the Australian Residential Sector*. CHOICE Switch has links to the CHOICE Green website, where you can compare prices and claims of GreenPower providers.

CHOICE Switch aims to take the pain out of switching and we are working hard to make it both comprehensive and transparent for your benefit. Contributions to CHOICE from the service will help us continue our work for consumers, including advocacy, campaigns and research.

For more information, go to www.choicewitch.com.au.

CLARIFICATION OVENS, OCTOBER 2008

On page 45 under the subheading "Bottom element and fan, or fan-assisted baking", the last sentence in that paragraph should have read, "All the tested models except BLANCO, CHEF, MIELE, and SMEG have fan-assisted baking, and only the MIELE and BLANCO have the bottom element and fan function."

CORRECTION DIGITAL SLRS, NOVEMBER 2008

In the table on page 50 we said the Pentax K200D incorporated the liveview feature. The camera does not have this feature.



REWARDS CARDS

Whatever your dream...

Rewards cards promise to make your dreams come true, but how do they measure up?

"Turn your everyday spending into anything you dream of..." promises the new David Jones American Express rewards card.

Next to the recently introduced Woolworths MasterCard and the Myer Visa card, the new David Jones card rewards your spending with loyalty points that can be converted into gift cards to use at the retailer.

See our table opposite on how the three cards compare. Rewards cards are usually only worthwhile if you spend more than \$1000 per month and always repay your credit card in full.

The reason is that you usually have to pay an annual fee, such as \$99 for the David Jones credit card, and normally need to spend a large amount to receive a reward. To earn a \$100 Woolworths gift voucher you'll need to spend more than \$17,000 if you only use the credit card outside Woolworths.

You get more points for every dollar you spend inside the shop than outside – if you spend about \$3300 dollars at Myer you receive a \$100 gift card. Both Woolworths and Myer also have gift cards for smaller amounts (starting from \$20) for a lower spending limit.

CHOICE is currently looking into these and other rewards cards. If you have one, we'd be interested to hear your experiences, good or bad. Please contact us at money@choice.com.au and include a daytime phone number. ■



	DAVID JONES AMEX	MYER VISA	WOOLWORTHS MASTERCARD
Annual fee	\$99	\$39	\$49
First year fee free?	No, but bonus \$50 gift card	Yes	Yes
Interest rate	20.49%	18.99%	0% until 1 Feb 2009; after that, 18.99% on purchases and 21.99% on cash advances
Points per \$ in store	2 (4 in the first six months)	3	2 (3 for Woolworths Select products)
Points per \$ elsewhere	1.5 (3 in the first six months)	1	1
\$ spent in store for \$100 gift card	\$6650 (\$3325 in the first six months)	\$3333	\$8620 (\$5747 Woolworths Select products)
\$ spent elsewhere for \$100 gift card	\$8867 (\$4433 in the first six months)	\$10,000	\$17,240
Other rewards available?	Yes, \$100 travel voucher: \$10,000 elsewhere or \$7500 in store (\$5000 elsewhere or \$3750 in store in the first six months)	No	No
Points cap	No	Maximum of 2000 points (\$2000 per month outside Myer)	No

HEALTH



Bisphenol A: Now what?

New research highlights the need for caution around, and further research into, a controversial chemical found in food packaging.

While the evidence for potential health effects is not conclusive, it seems prudent to minimise your exposure to BPA.

A recent US study has cast further doubts on the safety of bisphenol A (BPA), a chemical found in food and drink packaging. The study linked levels of BPA in urine samples with increased rates of heart disease and diabetes in adults, as well as liver enzyme abnormalities. While previous low-dose animal studies have raised concerns among health professionals, this is the first large-scale study of BPA among humans. The authors, however, readily admit some of the shortcomings of the study, pointing out that it's only one non-longitudinal study, and called for further research.

Various international health authorities also have concerns about BPA and are calling for action. In Canada, the government's advice is to reduce exposure to BPA among newborns and infants under 18 months. Animal studies have shown that BPA has greater potential health effects early in life.

The US National Toxicology Program, which is part of the National Institutes of Health, has also issued cautions about exposure to BPA. It has assigned a risk rating of three (where one is "negligible concern" and five is "high concern") to BPA with regard to its potential effects on the prostate gland, the brain and behaviour in foetuses, infants and children, while there is negligible concern for adults.

The US Food and Drug Administration, which is responsible for legislation involving food and drink

packaging, remains unconcerned about BPA, as does the European Food Safety Authority, which points out that animals process BPA differently from humans and are much more susceptible to its effects. The position of Food Standards Australia New Zealand, Australia's food safety authority, is in line with that of the European authority.

However, while the evidence for its potential health effects is far from conclusive, it seems prudent to minimise exposure as we await further research.

Can you avoid it?

The short answer is, you probably can't. BPA is used in polycarbonate plastics, such as those used to make hard drink containers (like baby bottles), storage containers and reusable water bottles. Containers labelled with the plastics recycling symbol "7" may be made from polycarbonate: 7 is used to denote "other plastics", and includes non-polycarbonate plastics.

BPA is more likely to migrate from plastic when heated, so Canadian authorities recommend parents not put boiling water in baby bottles. Heating bottles in the microwave is also not recommended. You could look for non-polycarbonate containers and bottles. BPA is also present in the resins that line food and drink cans, certain medical devices and dental sealants, highlighting the need for further research. ■

+ PRODUCT SAFETY

CHOICE calls for action on imported goods

China's melamine contamination highlighted safety and inspection issues in food and goods coming into Australia.



Australia's ad hoc approach to inspecting food imports has come under scrutiny following the recent melamine food scare. Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) reassured Australian parents that no infant formula or mainstream dairy products were imported from China when infant formula adulterated with melamine was found to be responsible for the deaths of four babies in China and made some 50,000 sick.

Following this, FSANZ announced the withdrawal of imported White Rabbit lollies, Cadbury Eclairs (180g blue packets) and Kirin Milk Tea after melamine was detected. These could be the first in a long list of recalls, despite claims the toxic chemical would be unlikely to cause health problems in small quantities.

Regulations require any food sold

in Australia to be safe, and all products – imported or locally made – must meet the same food standards. However, other countries have different safety standards and testing regimes from our own.

The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) assesses about 5% of imported foods. All consignments of "high-risk" products are assessed. But high-risk status is generally limited to cooked meat, poultry and seafood products as well as some dairy products. This is based on the food rather than the importing country. AQIS does not single out one particular country's products for more rigorous testing.

CHOICE believes food regulators across the globe were caught off-guard by China's contaminated milk because inspectors would only test for melamine if they thought

it might be present. In 2007, the US Food and Drug Administration detained certain Chinese seafood products until they were proven to be free from unapproved antimicrobial chemicals. In the same year, Chinese ingredients were also thought to be the cause of a global pet food recall and Mattel Australia was forced to recall some 400,000 Chinese-made toys after they were found to contain high levels of lead.

Testing every imported product for every potential hazard or contaminant would be virtually impossible and unnecessary – not to mention extremely costly. However, CHOICE feels that if the safety practices of a particular country are repeatedly called into question, regulators should treat foods and other products from that country with a higher degree of caution. ■

+ ENVIRONMENT

Green fun

We all love a good concert or festival, but what effect is our fun having on the environment – and how can we be sure the organisers are doing their bit to lessen the impact on the environment?



Everywhere you look there's a concert, festival or fair advertised. Drawing large numbers of people, they have the potential to impact greatly on the environment. Fortunately, the green message is catching on and sustainable events are more common. Unfortunately, it's not the case for many mainstream events, even though there are companies that advise on and audit sustainable practices.

So what makes an event more sustainable?

- **Power** Ideally, no regular mains power is used – preferably bio-diesel, solar, wind or other renewable energy sources are used.
- **Advertising** Promotional materials should be made from recyclable material, and electronic ticketing can also be considered.
- **Catering** Biodegradable and compostable plates and cutlery should be used, while locally grown, organic food is a plus.
- **Waste** Providing clearly marked bins for general waste, organic waste and recyclables is ideal. Regular maintenance is important as overflowing bins discourage people from using them.

- **Hygiene** Flushable toilets that use as little water as possible should be provided, but composting toilets are ideal. Water-free hand sanitisers may also be provided.
- **Transport** Public transport and car-pooling should be encouraged.
- **Improvements in the existing environment** Many sustainable festivals have a tree-planting scheme, for carbon offsetting and for improving the environment in which the event is held.
- **Education** Once all these strategies are in place, it's important to tell event participants about them.

While many local councils recognise the importance of sustainability, not many impose guidelines to gain council approval for an event. CHOICE believes event organisers should be required to adopt the above principles before they can gain council approval. Auditing would be an important aspect of this process, not only as a means of checking that practices are followed, but also to see where improvements can be made. ■

CYBER SAFETY

Avoiding email scams

There are easy ways to protect yourself against the growing phenomenon of cyber-crime.



With the busiest time of year fast approaching, make sure you don't drop your defences when it comes to cyber safety. In particular, look out for email scams, phishing and even identity fraud. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, phishing and email scams claimed 57,800 victims in the 12 months to December 2007.

To help you stay safe:

- Don't open an e-card unless you know the person who sent it.
- Exercise the same caution with personal information online as you do in the real world.

- If an offer sounds too good to be true – it is.
- Check that your email program has phishing protection enabled.
- Set the email filter in your email program to filter or block suspect spam or junk emails.
- Do not follow any links in an email that claims to be from your bank or financial institution – type in all URLs.
- Ensure your internet browser has security options turned on.
- For more information, see CHOICE October 2008 or go to www.choice.com.au and search "identity fraud". ■

ENVIRONMENT

Alco-flops

It's been only a few months since the Rudd government raised the tax on alcopops, but already loopholes are being exploited.



Earlier this year the federal government increased the tax rate on pre-mixed alcoholic drinks – ready to drink (RTDs) beverages or "alcopops". They're generally part spirit and part non-alcoholic drink, and include Vodka Cruisers and Bacardi Breezers. Their sweet, non-alcoholic taste appeals to underage drinkers, and consequently they've been blamed for an increase in binge drinking.

CHOICE conducted a taste test with 18- and 19-year-olds to see how easy it was for them to detect alcohol in alcopops and other alcoholic drinks (March 2008). The results were worrying – 24% of trialists thought there was no alcohol in the alcopops they tasted.

The government argued the price hike would curb the binge-drinking epidemic, while some critics believed it had more to do with raising revenue. The tax increase means alcopops are now taxed at the same rate as spirits.

Unfortunately, a loophole exists whereby alcopops can be made using ethanol sourced from wine or beer, effectively replicating

spirit-based alcopops without attracting the same level of tax. The Winemakers Federation of Australia and Australasian Associated Brewers released a joint statement promising not to exploit the loophole by ruling out the practice. But Independent Distillers, producers of Vodka Cruisers and Vodka Mudshakes (see *Shonky Awards*, page 14), recently announced the introduction of an alcopop made with alcohol derived from beer, soon to be launched in the Australian market.

Alcohol-related issues have a major bearing on health services and a huge social impact. While in general CHOICE supports taxation as a measure to reduce the consumption of alcohol, we believe this must be accompanied by other measures to address the causes of binge drinking. The advertising and marketing of alcohol is one area the government doesn't have to touch, but it has a real impact on underage drinkers. We hope Independent Distillers won't proceed with this product and we urge the government to close the loophole. ■

In brief

Good nutrition game

A Sydney mother has invented the Good Food Puzzle (www.goodfoodpuzzle.blogspot.com), a game that teaches children how to eat a balanced diet. Each piece represents part of the daily recommended food intake and is placed in a tray as the food is eaten. Junk food is not represented so can't help the child complete the puzzle.



Beware the hair ... irons

According to the American Academy of Dermatology, daily use of ceramic flat irons can, at the highest setting, cause massive damage to the outer part of the hair fibre. One dermatologist says they should only be used on dry hair, never more than twice a week and at temperatures below 175°C.

Talcum powder raises cancer risk

Harvard Medical School researchers have found that using talcum powder weekly raises the risk of ovarian cancer by 36%, and 41% for daily use. Previous studies raised concerns but this study confirms it's a greater risk than previously thought, particularly for those with a certain genetic profile. Women should avoid using talc on their genitals until further research is completed.



+ DIGITAL CAMERA STORAGE DEVICE

Modern-day photo album

This storage device is designed to take the place of a laptop or multiple memory cards for the photographer on the go.

HYPERDRIVE
Colospace

Price \$289 (no hard drive) to
\$465 (120GB hard drive)

Contact www.hyperdrive.com

There are many products on the market similar to, but more expensive than, the Colospace.

The HYPERDRIVE Colospace comprises a screen (45mm x 33mm), optional hard drive and battery in a plastic case. It has slots at the top and sides suitable for Compact Flash types I and II, a Microdrive, SD Card, MM Card, MS, MS Pro and MS Duo/Pro flash memory cards, all managed by upgradable onboard firmware.

GOOD POINTS

- Its 320 x 240 (QVGA) screen resolution is just adequate for organising and browsing images.
- At 269g, it's light enough to carry in a bag but is too large for a pocket (75mm x 134mm x 26mm, WxHxD).
- The hard drive and battery can be easily replaced – the hard drive can be any brand but the battery must be purchased from an authorised dealer.
- The menu system is basic but functional. However, the markings on the five control buttons are obscure.
- AC charger and a DC cigarette lighter connector are supplied.
- It has a recovery and card analysis/repair function that worked quite well on a damaged SanDisk 96MB CF card. It can recover deleted files from a card if the file hasn't been overwritten.

- It claims to display JPEGs, as well as RAW image files from Canon, Fujifilm, Konica Minolta, Leica, Nikon, Olympus, Panasonic, Pentax, Ricoh, Samsung, Sigma and Sony. We checked Canon and Nikon RAW and JPEGs, which were OK. The firmware can be upgraded and later versions could add more brands.

- Connects to both PCs and Macs via USB.

BAD POINTS

- The screen is too small for slide shows or sharing.
- It claims to be able to download 120GB of data on one battery charge, but the best we managed was 32.4GB from memory cards. If the claim means downloading to your computer from the HYPERDRIVE, it's more likely to succeed because it will be drawing power from the USB connection.
- It claims a transfer speed of about 1GB per minute. Using large RAW files and a SanDisk Extreme III CF 4GB card, it managed 1GB in three minutes 20 seconds. When we put small images on the same card, it could only manage to download just under 300MB in three-and-a-half minutes. Faster cards may help, but most won't get close to its claimed speed.

CHOICE VERDICT

The HYPERDRIVE Colospace is functional but it claims more than it delivers. There are also many similar, if more expensive, products on the market. If you'd like us to take a deeper look at photo storage, please let us know – go to our website at www.choice.com.au and follow the 'Request-a-test' link. ■

+ CHILD-FRIENDLY HEADPHONES

Playing by ear

These headphones promise to protect your child's ears from excessive noise.

Children grow up fast, and it's not long before they develop an interest in music, especially with the ubiquitous white cords from portable media players trailing out of many people's ears these days. So it's not surprising they may want to listen to their own music, or you may want them to listen to their music privately – especially if it's the Wiggles on repeat.

We looked at a pair of headphones designed specifically for children aged six years or older. Our audio tester didn't find any fault with the sound quality of the headphones, but he did emphasise that the quality of the MP3 player determines the sound quality. While the lead for plugging them into the player is short, it's suitable for a child.

A main selling point of these headphones is the volume-limiting feature, which works in a very basic way. There is a volume control on the headphone lead that has a very small amount of travel, which the child can easily use. On the reverse, two screws cover another volume control which allows the parent to limit the maximum volume the child can hear. This means you can limit the potential damage that loud sounds can cause. Fine adjustments would be difficult to make, but it's suitable for limiting volume.

A savvy child may realise that a quick job with a cross-head screwdriver will let them get to the highest claimed volume, but it's unlikely. A quick dollop of glue on the screws will delay that outcome.

CHOICE VERDICT

Despite its limited volume adjustment, the headphones do provide a way of protecting your child's ears. The fact that they rely on some screws to provide that protection is a factor which will prevent most children from turning up their latest tune to full volume. ■

PHILIPS Headband
Headphones
SHK1030

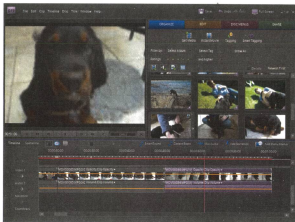
Price \$30

Contact Target stores

+ ADOBE ELEMENTS 7 BUNDLE

Upgrade your image

With this package you'll be confident in the director's chair for movies and the designer's studio for stills.



ADOBE Photoshop Elements 7 and ADOBE Premiere Elements 7

Price \$189

Contact www.adobe.com.au

Despite some tricky interface revamps, both these programs are still among the best at what they do.

mobile phone), and media files can be automatically tagged with descriptive names such as dialogue, music, shake, zoom, static, blur and so on, to make them easier to find and retrieve while editing.

Instant Movie is an easy way to take advantage of auto-tagging and throw a movie together quickly. Pick some video, add some music and choose a theme, then the Instant Movie feature does the editing for you.

Also new to Premiere Elements is the VideoMerge feature, giving you an automated chroma key (blue screen) tool that lets you replace the background of a clip with something else.

By contrast, Photoshop Elements 7 isn't exactly bursting with new features and unfortunately the online tools provided by Photoshop.com aren't yet available outside the US. However, it's still a very good program. Probably the best new feature is the Smart Brush, which lets you instantly apply a wide range of photo effects and filters with a magic wand-like approach. A new Scene Cleaner tool can also be extremely handy, enabling you to remove unwanted objects from an image with ease.

CHOICE VERDICT

These two programs bring you all the tools that made previous versions such an effective combination, with some welcome additions. There are several revamps to the interface that may take getting used to, but both applications are still among the best at what they do.

For the full story on the ADOBE Elements 7 bundle, look out for the Jan/Feb 2009 issue of *CHOICE Computer*. To subscribe, call 1800 069 552 toll-free or go to www.choice.com.au/magazines. ■

Adobe's consumer-level digital editing tools for still images and movies have had a major upgrade and can be bought in a money-saving bundle. ADOBE's Premiere Elements 7 and Photoshop Elements 7 bring a new level of power to multimedia tools for the home computer and, as you would expect, they work well together.

Version 7 of the movie-making software, Premiere Elements, has undergone an extensive facelift to make it easier to use and now includes support for the new video formats used by solid-state and hard-drive based camcorders. It includes connectivity options for most of today's popular video sources (including video from your

Coming

Cordless phones

Despite the plague proportions of mobile phones and internet use, the humble landline is far from extinct. Models have evolved to now support features such as Bluetooth. We explain how you can extend your reach and keep in touch throughout the house by reviewing the latest answering machine-free cordless phones.



Media players

Getting your head around the growing number of portable media players, MP3 players, MP4 players and video players on the market is easier said than done. To help you out, we test a bunch of the latest players for battery life, sound and video quality.

Car cleaners

In a time where water conservation is now more important than ever before, we investigate the range of options available for cleaning your car, including the so-called "waterless" car washes, to see which are kindest to the environment and the most sustainable.





Email or write — we want to hear from you.

Your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. See opposite for how to contact us.

Kind to the Earth?

Mean to chooks

■ I'm writing about the Wattle Ridge brand eggs on supermarket shelves. "The environment egg" is just below the name as part of the branding.

This has to be one of the most blatant examples of greenwashing I've ever seen. Despite the misleading packaging, the eggs come from caged chickens on the Pace Farm, which produces a high percentage of the rest of Australia's egg supply.

Are these guys skating on thin ice in terms of misleading the public? I feel this company is profiting from consumers who don't have the time or inclination to look closely at the label as to the welfare of the creatures that produced the eggs. Consumers basing their purchases on 90% of the packaging's cues would assume they are buying free-range or barn-laid eggs.

Stuart McMillen, via email

CHOICE says We agree that the Wattle Ridge packaging is confusing. It takes an eagle eye to spot the word "cage" printed on the side of the box, an issue we covered in our egg article earlier this year (CHOICE, July 2008).

Our research also confirms that Wattle Ridge is owned by Pace Farm, one of Australia's biggest egg producers. This kind of packaging further underlines just how difficult it can be for consumers to buy ethically — whether it is an

environmentally friendly product or in this case an animal-friendly product.

While the Egg Corp Assured logo implies a certain standard of care, these hens are still in cages. For more on dodgy egg advertising check out the CHOICE Shonky Awards on page 14.

Solar output discrepancy

■ I was disappointed to note in the otherwise excellent feature on solar panels (CHOICE, September 2008) that you failed to mention the major and admitted discrepancy between the wattage output seemingly (and in most cases actually) claimed for solar modules and what they produce in real life. This is due to an industry rating method that does not remotely reflect real-life usage.

In normal Australian usage a "100 watt solar module" produces only about 80W in a grid-connect system, and about 70W in a stand-alone system.

This is not simply conjecture: almost all solar modules have a panel on their rear face that quotes their more probable output. Such output is also revealed in the makers' technical literature.

Despite knowing this, vendors universally promote their systems by multiplying the nominal wattage of the modules used by the number of modules used. In reality, systems marketed as 1.0kW, for example, at best produce only 0.8kW. This difference is not trivial at \$12,000-\$15,000 per claimed kilowatt.

It is sad to see CHOICE essentially validating this ongoing, universal and major deception.

Collyn Rivers, Broome, WA

Choice says The industry sources we contacted back up most of your claims. The Clean Energy Council states that your letter is partly correct and the standard test conditions under which panels are tested differ



▶ Anthony and Louise wanted their house in Ashfield, NSW, to be sustainable so installed solar panels (CHOICE, September 2008).

from real-world conditions. CEC also notes that "other system losses impact on energy generation, such as temperature, solar irradiance and air mass — none of which are constant". It says PV system vendors should be able to provide comprehensive documentation to ensure consumers are aware of the system performance, as well as estimates of average daily energy production for each month or at least each year.

The Alternative Technology Association also says Mr Rivers' claims are correct, and thinks solar panels should be tested at more realistic temperatures to provide figures that reflect energy output more accurately.

Thanks for helping to bring to the attention of our readers the underperformance of PV panels when compared with manufacturers' claims.

Lights off

■ Recently the light bulb in my six-year-old Sharp microwave oven blew. I pulled the cover off and extracted the broken halogen bulb. A trip to the hardware store and electrical wholesaler proved futile as it was an uncommon type of globe.

As a last resort, I called the spare parts number listed on Sharp's website. I was told that a bulb was available for \$70.70, plus \$9.90 postage and handling — not much less than the price of some microwave ovens. Similar globes at the hardware store (although of a slightly different size) averaged about \$5 and none were more than \$10.



If Sharp cannot use common, easily obtainable globes, they should at least price theirs comparably. Charging such a high price has made me think twice about buying another Sharp product again.

How can Sharp justify charging such a premium?

Robert Allen, via email

Thumbs up!

■ Rachel Appleby would like to offer a Thumbs up to Virgin Blue for its no-fuss and prompt service. After taking a flight to Melbourne, upon collecting her bag she discovered a wheel missing from her expensive new suitcase. Virgin Blue provided her with a bag in which to take her clothes home and said the bag would be repaired and delivered within a week. Later she received a call to say that the bag couldn't be repaired, so they provided her with

CHOICE says A Sharp spokesperson said that the quartz halogen lamps used in the microwave ovens put out a better light and are more reliable than a conventional lamp, thereby reducing service costs during the life of the product. Sharp warns consumers against attempting to replace lamps themselves, saying that this should

only be done by a trained service person.

While Sharp admits that lamps of this type are more expensive than a conventional lamp, they say they are of a much greater quality than what would be found in a hardware store, and the fact that one lamp lasted for six years is a testament to the quality of the lamps they use.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Promotion overdo\$e

■ Congratulations on your article on prescription drug promotion (CHOICE, September 2008). I am a clinical pharmacologist (a doctor specialising in drugs and how they work and should be used) who also teaches undergraduate medical students. I have been dismayed over the years when, despite my best efforts at informing them, a number of students clearly cannot wait to get their hands on all the freebies (pens, books, dinners, trips) that go with drug promotion. The companies start early, and most students in the hospital already have branded promotional pens and other gadgets. This early acceptance undoubtedly contributes to the very high rate of belief in one key piece of misinformation you identified among GPs – that they are impervious to these promotional activities.

Forewarned is forearmed, and those doctors who are aware of the likelihood



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See overleaf
for details

Green is the new red

Celebrate Christmas with a green conscience.

A paper making set is a useful gift that will help with the leftover wrapping paper.

A Plantable Seed Card can live on in your garden. Plant it, water it and watch it grow.

Give a much-needed donation with an Oxfam Unwrapped card.

Take a reusable shopping bag and say no to plastic bags.

Disposable plates, bowls and cutlery made from natural materials can be recycled or composted.

Buy beautiful boxes and ribbons from Reverse Garbage.

Make a fair trade food hamper with Oxfam coffee and tea.



The festive season is almost here and most of us are in the full swing of shopping. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australians spent more than \$2.7 billion in department stores in the month leading up to Christmas 2007. If even a small percentage of this were spent on ethical Christmas gifts, it could make a big difference. There's a lot more you can do to have a greener, more sustainable festive season. We've put together some ideas for a Christmas that is kinder to the environment.

Tree

Opt for a living Christmas tree, such as a Wollemi pine, instead of a cut tree. A potted tree can be decorated for the festive season then enjoyed all year – you can even use it again next Christmas. Since the discovery of the Wollemi in 1994 in the Blue Mountains, fewer than 100 adult trees have been identified in the wild, so you'll be helping preserve the future of this ancient conifer. If it's not at your local nursery, you can order one online at www.wollemipine.com.

A plywood Christmas tree is another alternative – it has less environmental impact than a traditional pine tree. Check out www.buronorth.com that sells flat-pack trees online.

Food

Your festive feast will be better for the environment if you opt for sustainably managed seafood. Unfortunately, inadequate labelling means it's not always easy to identify, but it's worth looking out for the Marine Stewardship Council (www.msc.org) sustainable fishing logo or use the Australian Marine Conservation Society's (www.amcs.org.au) Sustainable Seafood Guide when buying seafood.

If there's leftover food at your work Christmas party consider giving it to a charity that will redistribute it to the needy. Services such as OzHarvest can help (www.ozharvest.org.au).

Lights

If you can't go without decorative lights, choose energy-saving LEDs. Or if you are going to swaddle your house in lights and have been thinking about making the switch to green power, now might be the time. To find the cheapest accredited GreenPower deal for your home, click on the CHOICE Green icon on the home page of the CHOICE site (www.choice.com.au) and see our GreenPower price comparison survey.

Cards & decorations

Cut down on paper and make your own cards, reuse saved wrapping paper or make your own decorations with items you already have. For ideas on how to reuse household items to make decorations go to www.planetark.com and click on Cards 4 Planet Ark.

Use your computer to create personalised cards in Microsoft Word or Publisher that you can send via email. If you're too busy to make your own, you can send a free ecard from www.care2.com. If you're buying Christmas cards, go for charity cards that support a worthy cause. If you can't find them in stores, shop online. For UNICEF cards, go to <http://merchandise.unicef.org.au> and www.charitygreetingcards.com.au sells cards from a range of charities, including the Cancer Council, Heart Foundation and the RSPCA.

Tableware

To cut down on waste going to landfill, avoid using throwaway plates and cutlery. Be green by using disposable plates made from renewable materials, such as corn starch or sugar cane, marked compostable and/or recyclable. They can usually be found in specialist stores such as EarthBasics in the ACT (www.earthbasics.com.au) or Ikko online at www.ikko.com.au.

Presents

Go green with your gifts. Vouchers for movie tickets, massages or facials can be easier on the environment than physical presents, or give the gift of your time to spend with loved ones or a worthwhile charity. Try to avoid gifts with too much plastic and packaging, and look for handmade items that use recycled materials. Shop on sites such as www.madeit.com.au for locally made presents.

Buy fair trade or ethical gifts, such as T-shirts and diaries from Greenpeace, www.greenpeacegiving.org.au; clothing and bags from Friends of the Earth, www.foe.org.au/shop; or coffee and tea from Oxfam shops or online at www.oxfamshop.org.au. For more ideas:

- East Timor Women Australia sells a range of hand-woven products on www.etwa.org.au/products.htm
- The Smith Family has a 2008 Christmas Gift Guide on www.thesmithfamily.com.au
- WWF Australia sells wine, eco-gadgets and donation vouchers on www.wwf.org.au/shop
- Amnesty International has books, cards and T-shirts on shop.amnesty.org.au

Batteries

Christmas is a time of giving – gadgets, toys and electrical devices that can chew through loads of batteries that might contain toxic metals such as cadmium, mercury and lead, which can be harmful to the environment when disposed of in landfill. By choosing rechargeable batteries you can save money in the long term while helping to reduce waste. See *Charged and ready*, page 56, for our pick of the best rechargeable batteries on the market.

Reuse/recycle

Check out local centres that resell or recycle consumer, business or industrial leftovers that can be used for making decorations or gifts. A good example is Reverse Garbage in Sydney, which has an online shop (www.reversegarbage.org.au) selling packs of recycled materials. You can register with Freecycle (www.freecycle.org) to find homes for your unwanted items or locate useful freebies in your local area.

Planet Ark and Australia Post have a card recycling program – get a free reply paid envelope from any post office to send your cards to Planet Ark. Last year the scheme saved more than 575 million Christmas cards – more than 100,000 trees. See www.planetark.org, www.recyclingnearyou.com.au, or your council for information.

Shop smart



The Greenhouse Friendly logo, which is starting to appear on products, tells you that a product or service meets the standards set by the Australian Greenhouse Office (AGO), a federal government initiative. The emissions from the manufacture of certified products have been offset, or balanced out, by other activities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. See www.carbonoffsetwatch.org.au for more on reducing emissions.

Waste

As the season of consumption, Christmas creates a lot of waste. Try to minimise yours by focusing on the quality, not quantity, of presents and in preparation for receiving lots of gifts, why not make room for them at home by donating pre-loved, good, working items to charities?

In the festive afterglow, recycle your containers, compost leftover food and store paper, ribbons and decorations for next year. Go to www.recyclingnearyou.com.au or Keep Australia Beautiful (www.keepaustraliabeautiful.org.au) for information about recycling and how to properly dispose of electrical and other household items. ■



FESTIVE FUN ONLINE

The CHOICE website has step-by-step guides on how to make a Christmas e-card, or a Christmas card in Word. To find these, go to www.choice.com.au/green.

If what we spend on sustainable gifts this year is just a fraction of what was spent in department stores last year, it would make a big difference.



MAKE IT A SUSTAINABLE CHRISTMAS ONLINE

- If you're travelling, get some ideas to reduce your carbon emissions on www.travelsmart.gov.au.
- Print some fold-it-yourself paper ornaments from patterns on www.papertoys.com.
- Give a gift of charity on the Tithing Tree – www.thetithingtree.org.au.
- To challenge friends and family to a gift-free Christmas, use guides such as www.xmasresistance.org.
- Find more ideas for a green-friendly Christmas on ecobites.com/green-celebrations.
- To turn your presents into e-gifts that provide a donation to a charity or ethical organisation, go to Oxfam Unwrapped (www.oxfamunwrapped.com.au), Project Concern (www.projectconcern.org), or Habitat for Humanity (www.habitat.org).
- Get an estimate of your eco footprint for Christmas or any time of the year, on www.kab.org.au/eco_footprint/eco_foot_print_calc.htm

The 2008 CHOICE Shonkys

Who takes home our most
coveted yearly awards?



It's been another really good year for the CHOICE Shonky Awards, with manufacturers, service providers and especially the marketing and advertising industry providing a fine list of nominations. Regular award winners, such as the banks, telcos and food advertising, have again been joined by a number of products you should stay well clear of – plus a fine example of “greenwash”. This area promises to provide an increasing number of future winners, unless our campaign to establish some honesty around environmental claims is successful.

But without further ado, please stand back, seek shelter, be alarmed but don't panic, because here's this year's crème-de-la-crème of cunning, the standouts of spin, the deliverers of dodginess – the 10 deserving winners of the CHOICE SHONKYS for 2008.

See video of the Shonky Awards at www.choice.com.au/shonkys. 

The CHOICE Shonky for Muddled Disguise

Goes to



(Published in CHOICE, March 2008)

Vodka Mudshake Original Chocolate

Drinking alcohol is an undeniable part of Australian social life. While the legal age for buying alcohol is 18, underage drinking is a big issue.

Let's target an opportunity, thought parts of the alcohol industry, and create and market drinks that combine sweet flavours, bright colours, trendy names and packaging with alcohol – and alcopops were born.

They've become the most commonly consumed form of alcohol among 12- to 17-year-old girls, and the drink of choice for underage binge drinkers.

When CHOICE conducted a blind taste test with 78 teenagers aged 18 and 19, they all recognised alcohol in beer and wine. But only about two thirds overall thought the alcopops contained alcohol, and only about half of the males detected it in the Vodka Mudshake Original Chocolate.

Disguising 4% alcohol in a drink that looks and tastes like a milkshake? We think that's really shonky.

**With their sweet flavours and
trendy marketing, alcopops
are the drink of choice for
underage binge drinkers.**

The CHOICE Shonky for Egg On Your Face

Goes to

AUSTRALIAN EGG
CORPORATION LIMITED



(Published in CHOICE, July 2008)

Australian Egg Corporation

If you're concerned about animal welfare, you may have been buying free-range eggs in the hope they come from more cheerful chicks than their cramped cage cousins. After all, some of the cartons show happy hens roaming in lush, green paddocks. But don't be fooled. The term "free-range" has no legal definition in Australia.

There are voluntary standards, such as FREPAA's, the Free Range Egg and Poultry Association of Australia. However, the vast majority of free-range eggs are certified by the Australian Egg Corporation, the national industry body representing about 90% of producers. Conveniently, its Egg Corp Assured scheme has a more relaxed definition of free-range than the voluntary standards, making it easier for members to use the free-range label and access the shopping dollar from concerned consumers.

Even true free-range chicks spend more time in a shed than outdoors. But while FREPAA restricts the number of hens to seven per square metre of shed area, Egg Corp Assured allows 14 – not much less than the 18/m² in cage systems. Unlike FREPAA, Egg Corp allows beak trimming and shed sizes on a scale that means many chicks will never find their way outdoors.

CHOICE thinks there's an urgent need for a clear national definition of free-range, and tighter regulation, rather than continued reliance on a shonky industry scheme.

The CHOICE Shonky for Just Too Much Hot Air

Goes to

AIROBE



Airobe Luxury Body Dryer

Imagine a device that lets you dry yourself "in minutes" after a shower. But wait – you're saying you already have one? No, we don't mean a towel. We're talking about the Airobe Luxury Body Dryer – a 9kW heater and fan installed in the bathroom ceiling (think really big hair dryer) that creates an "envelope of rapidly moving warm air" in which you can immerse your wet body. And don't forget to take the remote control with you, so you can switch between full and half-blast.

This is no April Fool's Day gag; it's real, and it can be yours for \$995, plus about \$350 installation. But it gets better; according to the marketing material the Airobe is in fact a money-saving green product, because you won't have to wash any more towels.

The creative calculations used to prove this assume two washes of towels only per week (none if you have an Airobe), the use of a tumble dryer and include fixed water supply fees. Even using those figures, the break-even time for an Airobe is about 10 years. Without deducting the water supply fee (after all, you may still want to use water for other purposes), it will take 20 years. And if you use a clothesline instead of a dryer, the Airobe uses a lot more energy than you do washing towels – part of which is about 10W of standby energy it draws all day, every day.

We could go on. But for us that's enough hot air already to deserve a Shonky.

The CHOICE Shonky for Betrayed Love

Goes to



(Published in CHOICE, July 2008)

You'll Love Coles Steam Iron

You may fall in love with this iron on your first date for its relatively cheap price (\$33) and the hot guy on the box talking about his ironing experiences. So you take it home and give it some water (which it sometimes leaks, but you don't mind because it's just water) and one thing leads to another, and before you know it it's all over your shirt, and doing your jeans, and even touching your finest synthetics. And that's when you realise it doesn't love you back! Not one bit.

There isn't the sensual glide you were hoping for – it rudely sticks to and roughly drags over your clothing as if it's always too hot or too cold. And does it fulfil your deepest desire to remove life's wrinkles and creases from the fabric of your fabrics? No, it doesn't. When you ask it to, it just laughs in your face and grabs the fabric and creates additional creases instead.

The You'll Love Coles steam iron is the most hated iron we sent on dates with our trialists this millennium, with an overall score of just 19%. To avoid a broken heart, we suggest you search for love elsewhere.

The CHOICE Shonky for Warranty, Schmarranty

Goes to



(Published in CHOICE, August 2008)

Equitrust capital warranty

"Earn 9.5% pa warranted," the ad says. "You wouldn't buy a telly without a warranty ... so why would you invest without one," the ad says. Don't trust an investment offer that sounds too good to be true, CHOICE says. We guarantee that warranty is shonky.

Equitrust is a mortgage trust offering interest rates a bit above what you can get for bank deposits with similar terms. It uses the investors' money for developer and other property loans. The marketing is centred around its supposed safety, but the \$10 million the company has set aside for its "capital warranty" covers only about 2.4% of the mortgage trust's value.

Now, most consumers understand warranties (such as for a toaster) to involve the replacement of the entire product should it prove defective. But there's no such promise for this investment.

What's more, the product disclosure statement quite clearly details the higher risks of investing in Equitrust compared with banks: for example, it's not as strict as banks when assessing the borrowers' capacity to repay their loans and accepts higher risks, and some loans are secured by developments that have yet to be built.

So despite advertising a warranty, Equitrust itself admits that "there can be no guarantee of a return of capital or income". As we said: why would you?

The CHOICE Shonky for Last Banks Standing

Goes to



Adelaide Bank and HSBC

Last year, Westpac accepted a Shonky on behalf of the Big Four banks for unfair penalty fees. Most banks have since reduced or dropped a number of those fees, at least on some accounts.

However, Adelaide Bank and HSBC continue to soldier on with a fee that's particularly unfair and difficult to justify – the inwards cheque dishonour fee. If you deposit a cheque into your regular transaction account with these banks and it bounces, you'll be charged \$12 and \$5, respectively.

A popular defence the banks use for charging penalty fees is that consumers can avoid them by keeping track of their spending, regularly checking account balances, and so on. However, there's no way you can avoid a third party doing the wrong thing and not honouring a cheque they wrote to you.

Charging these fees is just shonky, and CHOICE urges Adelaide Bank and HSBC to drop them on all accounts.

**If a cheque deposited into
your account bounces, you're
charged a dishonour fee.**

The CHOICE Shonky for Get Real – Bullshit (h2o+sugar+hype)

Goes to



(Published on CHOICE Online, August 2008)

Glaceau Vitamin Water

Hey, where do we start? This range of "nutrient enhanced water beverages" by Coca-Cola Amatil Australia is so shonky on so many levels that we could award each individually. With names like "essential – orange-orange (c+calcium)" or "revive – fruit punch (c+b3+b5+b6+b12)" and fruity colours, you'd be forgiven for thinking these drinks are healthy, or contain fruit juice. Which they're not. And which they don't.

Apart from the fact we think some of the marketing messages suggesting health benefits are in breach of food regulations, one bottle contains about a third of the recommended daily sugar intake for an average adult woman – hardly healthy. And none contains more than 1% fruit juice. What they do contain is flavouring, but you find that only in the fine print.

Then there's this message on one flavour: "Legally, we are prohibited from making exaggerated claims about the potency of the nutrients in this bottle." Followed by a number of exaggerated claims about the potency of the nutrients in the bottle.

We here at the Shonkys recognise humour when it slaps us in the face. But blatantly mocking food regulations designed to protect consumers from unsubstantiated and potentially misleading health claims? That's not funny – that's shonky.

The CHOICE Shonky for Premium Rip-off*

Goes to



(Published on CHOICE Online, July 2008)

Premium Mobile Services Industry

This one's for all you faceless companies who deliberately trick consumers (including kids) into costly content or even subscriptions they never wanted.

The Telecommunications Ombudsman receives more than 2000 complaints a month about mobile premium services – ringtones, games, horoscopes, chat services, age-restricted and other content you can access by calling numbers starting with 19. However, the fine print* usually reveals that these messages can cost several dollars a pop, or that by accessing one you're automatically signed up for a subscription, and may be sent further unsolicited messages at additional charges.

Unsubscribing, or contacting the provider is often very difficult, with recorded messages and auto-reply emails instead of customer service. Children and teens are prolific users of these services, and have been signed up for subscriptions costing hundreds of dollars, or been exposed to inappropriate content.

That's why an honourable mention goes to the telco industry association, the Communications Alliance for failing to set up proper consumer protection. While there's a code of practice, the number of complaints shows it's not working – a very shonky case of industry self-regulation. 📞

* Individual Shonkys are provided with maximum outrage. Accepting this Award constitutes a subscription to all future Shonky Awards.

The CHOICE Shonky for Customer Care Excellence

Goes to

citibank



(Published on CHOICE Online, March 2008)

Citibank

We love the banks. They're so creative in taking consumers for a ride – we couldn't make up half the stuff if we tried.

Take this one. If you have a Citibank credit card, you'll get a maximum of 55 interest-free days – to start with. If you then refuse to reward the bank by paying interest on your purchases, but pay off your credit card bill in full by the due date for 10 out of 12 months, Citibank reduces the maximum interest-free period to 44 days. They penalise you for paying them in full and on time. Having fewer days to pay will make it more likely that some customers will then struggle to pay on time – and be subjected to Citibank's late payment fee of \$40, one of the highest on the market.

It would be hilarious if it wasn't so sad. Customer care? More a case of: customers – who cares? 📞

Having fewer days to pay will make it more likely that some customers will struggle to pay on time – and be subjected to Citibank's \$40 late payment fee.

The CHOICE Shonky for Storm In A Teacup

Goes to



(Published in CHOICE, June 2008)

Hurricane Planet Green

The environment is hot, and not only because of the changing climate – it's a hot topic. Consumer awareness of green issues has increased, and products can get a marketing edge by being greener than others – or being perceived as greener.

Enter greenwash, the art of making vague, irrelevant or unsubstantiated environmental claims. One of the finest examples we found was this Colgate-Palmolive multipurpose cleaner.

There's not only the bold name. Under "Caring for our environment", the label lists the product's green credentials: Phosphate-free ✓ Biodegradable ✓ Recyclable packaging ✓ Australian made ✓. We say: Irrelevant ✓ False impression ✓ Why?

- Phosphates aren't a common ingredient in multipurpose cleaners.
- The biodegradability relates only to the cleaning agents, not the whole product – which is no different from a range of cleaners and not as good as some.
- While the Hurricane's bottle is recyclable, its trigger isn't. There are other cleaners whose bottle and trigger head are recyclable.
- Being Australian-made is no indicator of a product's green performance.

Bottom line: Hurricane doesn't green the planet as its name and claims try to make you believe. If you want a really green cleaner, there are better options on the shelf. ■

Closing the deposit gap

The government's First Home Saver Account scheme provides incentives for those trying to break into the property market. CHOICE tells you the seven important steps to take before deciding whether it is right for you and which are the best accounts.



nutshell

- The government will top up First Home Saver Accounts with a 17% contribution and offer a low tax rate on savings, but the rules are tight.
- We tell you where to find a good account with fair terms, low costs and high interest.

Expensive housing and home loan high interest rates are a crippling combination for anyone trying to get on the property ladder in Australia. Add in the soaring cost of rental accommodation and it's a wonder anyone can save for a home deposit. In fact, the so-called "deposit gap" – the difference between average house prices and the amount people are able to borrow – is now at a record high.

So if you're feeling locked out of the property market, what can you do? If you're not prepared to save until you have a 20% deposit, the alternatives are not that attractive. Some institutions lend close to the full purchase price for those with no deposit, but this could lead to repayment difficulties. You could ask parents or a relative to act as guarantor on your loan, but that transfers the risk to them if something goes wrong. You could go for a 40-year mortgage, but the repayments won't be much more affordable than with a 30-year loan, and you'll pay thousands more in interest in the long term. You could stay at home and join the growing number of "kippers" (kids in parents' pockets eroding retirement savings), but that may not be ideal for the kippers – or their parents.

Savings scheme to the rescue?

To provide incentives for people to save for their first home, the federal government launched the First Home Saver Account (FHSA) scheme on 1 October. Accounts may be offered by banks, building societies, credit unions, life insurance companies and public offer super funds (not self-managed super funds). They will set their own fees and interest rates, but have to comply with the government rules for the scheme.

To be eligible to open an account you must be at least 18 years old and under 65, have a tax file number and never have owned a home you lived in. However, you could have owned an investment property if you meet the conditions (go to www.homesaver.treasury.gov.au).

How First Home Saver Accounts work

For every dollar you put into an FHSA, the government will add 17 cents. The maximum government co-contribution is currently \$850 for each financial year. This year, if you put in \$5000, the government will add \$850. You can contribute more if you like, but only the first \$5000 (indexed) is eligible for the government's 17% co-contribution.

The government contribution will be received in the financial year after you lodge your income tax return and the FHSA provider files its reports with the tax office. You will also be able to earn interest at the rate the account provider offers or depending on investment performance.



USEFUL CONTACTS

- Treasury's FHSA website: www.homesaver.treasury.gov.au.
- The first home owner grant has increased to \$14,000 for existing dwellings until 30 June 2009 (or \$21,000 if you build your first home or buy a newly constructed one). Go to www.firsthome.gov.au.

CHOICE has set a benchmark of minimum standards for deposit FHSAs to meet: simple, fair accounts that provide a high interest rate.

Steps to deciding on an FHSA

1 Are you eligible? You must never have owned a home, be aged between 18 and 65 and have a tax file number.

2 Can you wait four financial years? If you think you might be ready to buy your first home sooner, don't open an FHSA. You won't be able to withdraw money from the account for your deposit or mortgage repayments; the balance of your account will divert to your superannuation fund.

3 Will the FHSA give you a tax advantage? For many people, 15% is less than the tax rate they'd pay on a regular savings account, which is taxed at your income tax rate. However, if you don't pay tax, you could be better off leaving your money in a regular high-interest savings account for now and opening an FHSA just before the end of the financial year, in time to get the government's 17% contribution.

4 Decide between a deposit or investment-style account Assuming investment fund FHSAs come onto the market, consider the pros and cons of each. Essentially, a deposit account is safe but may not provide as high returns. The value of an investment-style account may fluctuate (just look at what's happened with super funds over the past 12 months), but could provide higher returns over the medium to long term – five years and longer.

5 Compare providers and offers The table on page 21 lists most of the accounts available 1 November. Remember to check Product Disclosure Statements for fees, returns and conditions. Even deposit accounts that have no account fee or switching fee may have other costs, such as direct debit dishonour penalties.

6 Wait and see More accounts will be launched over the coming weeks and months, so you may benefit from waiting to see if price competition leads to better offers. Already we're seeing evidence of providers improving their interest rates and conditions as new competitors announce details of their offers. The disadvantage of waiting is that you are postponing the benefit of the lower FHSA tax rates.

7 Monitor the market Interest rates and fees can change, so you can switch to another FHSA provider if your account becomes uncompetitive. Check if an exit fee will apply. It's also worth keeping an eye on the maximum government contribution, which is indexed and can increase from \$850 per year over time. The maximum account balance (currently \$75,000) may also increase.

Tax of 15% applies to the interest or growth of the account. It is deducted from the account and paid to the tax office by the account provider.

You must keep the account open for at least four separate financial years and contribute at least \$1000 each year before withdrawals can be made. The contributions don't have to be made in consecutive years.

The maximum account balance is currently \$75,000, including any government contributions, interest earned, your savings, etc. The figure will be indexed over time and can increase in \$5000 increments.

You can only withdraw money to buy or build your first home. If you close the account for another reason, its balance is automatically transferred to superannuation. Withdrawals after four years to buy a home or transfer money to super, are tax-free.

CHOICE benchmark for deposit FHSAs

Banks, building societies and credit unions are already offering deposit-style FHSAs, similar in most ways to normal savings accounts. CHOICE has set a benchmark for the minimum standards we think you should look for from deposit FHSAs. Some of the accounts that fall just short of the benchmark can still provide good returns, but this standard is a guide to accounts that tick all the boxes – for being simple, fair accounts that provide a comparatively high interest rate.

- ✓ **Interest rate that matches or exceeds the Reserve Bank cash rate** The best accounts pay equivalent to the RBA's cash rate (6% on 1 November), or higher. Rates are variable and can change. Check the table on page 21.
- ✓ **Fair and simple interest** A high interest rate should be paid for all account balances, so savers with small amounts get a benefit equivalent to those with larger savings. Accounts with tiered interest rates, where less interest is paid for smaller account balances, fail our benchmark.
- ✓ **No account-keeping fee**
- ✓ **No exit or switch fee**
- ✓ **No fee to make deposits**
- ✓ **No minimum deposit or regular savings requirement**

You should be able to start the account with a small amount and continue to make small contributions when you can afford them. We also think a good account will allow you to take a break from regular deposits, while still paying interest on the full account balance.

- ✓ **Interest calculated daily and compounded monthly or quarterly on the full account balance** Some accounts accrue interest annually, leading to lower returns. We think daily interest should apply to the full account balance, from the day all deposits, including yours >

> and the government's, hit the account. The table on the opposite page shows how the accounts available so far compare on these criteria. Even after opening an account, you should continue to monitor how it compares with others – you can switch to another FHSA provider if your interest rate becomes uncompetitive.

Deposit-style v investment fund FSAs

The legislation allows for two distinct types of FSAs: deposit-style accounts, which are like a traditional bank savings account, and investment fund FSAs.

No investment FSAs have yet been launched. Assuming some are, they are more likely to resemble managed funds or superannuation funds than deposit accounts, and come with the associated risks. Providers may offer different options that have a range of risks and expected returns, such as a conservative, balanced or growth option, just like your super fund. The value of these market-linked investments can go up and down.

You might be comfortable with the risk in the expectation of better returns, particularly as FSAs are a medium-term investment. However, there are some things you need to pay particular attention to before choosing an investment FSA.

The investment strategy Treat your FSA like any other investment; find out where your money will be invested, including aspects such as the proportion in riskier growth assets such as shares and property, and in safer assets such as deposits and fixed interest.

The uncertainty of returns Your investment FSA might lose money and leave you with a lower deposit than you'd have with a safer option. On the other hand, it might provide better returns. You need to check out the type of investment. If the account invests in shares and property funds, expect fluctuations. If share prices fall, the balance of your savings would fall too. On the other hand, investment FSAs may also provide guaranteed or secure options.

Fees Check the establishment, entry, annual management and exit fees as well as the running costs. High fees take a chunk out of your returns. You might be

charged a management fee of 1.5% of the full balance (not just the interest or growth) of your account every year. And with some (non-FHSA) managed funds, entry fees of up to 5% of every contribution consumers make is creamed off.

Commissions Are commissions paid to financial advisers? With non-FHSA managed funds, entry fees may be shared with the financial planner who recommended investing in the fund. We don't know if the same commission arrangements will apply to investment FSAs when they are launched, but it's worth watching out for them. ■



FHSA FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Can I open an account for my 18-year-old daughter to help her save for a deposit?** No, but if your daughter opens an account, you can contribute to it. If you manage to contribute \$5000 each year, assuming a conservative average return of 4% per annum, in 10 years' time the account would be worth more than \$70,000. And that amount would be reached in a much shorter time if your daughter also contributes to the account.
- **What if I open an FHSA, but find the perfect home in two years and want to use money in the FHSA for a deposit?** This is a really important question. You won't be able to withdraw your money from the FHSA unless four financial years have elapsed. If you buy the property using money from other sources, your FHSA will be closed and its balance will be transferred to your super fund.
- **Can my partner and I both open an account and use the combined savings for a deposit?** Yes. As long as at least one of you satisfies the four-year rule, you can withdraw your money and combine the balance of your accounts to assist with your home purchase.
- **I plan to spend a year working and travelling abroad. Can I take a break from contributions?** Yes. You must contribute at least \$1000 in each of four financial years, but they don't have to be consecutive years. You can keep the account open while you're outside Australia. You can continue to contribute to it if you like, but you don't have to. However, in years that you're not an Australian resident for tax purposes, the government won't pay a co-contribution. And ANZ won't pay much interest in months when you don't make a contribution (ANZ fails our benchmark).
- **Can I salary sacrifice into an FHSA?** No, all contributions must be from after-tax income.
- **If I own an investment property, am I still eligible for the first home owner grant?** Check the relevant information for your state or territory via www.firsthome.gov.au. In Victoria, for example, you're ineligible for the grant if you had an interest in a residential property before July 2000, even if you didn't live in it. But if you owned an investment property after July 2000, and lived in it for less than six continuous months, you're still eligible for the grant.

Did you know?

There's a way for you to open an account for just over two years and still comply with the rules.

An FHSA opened in June 2009 and closed in July 2011 will have covered four separate financial years (they run from 1 July to 30 June). If you contribute at least \$1000 in each of the four financial years in that period, you will still have met the scheme's rules and you can withdraw the money to use for your first home.

FIRST HOME SAVER ACCOUNTS COMPARED

Institution	Interest rate (pa, before tax) *	Reason failed benchmark	Account fee	Interest credited	Minimum contribution	Switch/text fee	Other details	Website
ACCOUNTS THAT MEET CHOICE BENCHMARK (LISTED BY MAXIMUM INTEREST RATE)								
Members Equity Bank	8% (A)	na	No	Monthly	No	No	8% introductory rate until 28 Feb 2009; then variable rate	membersequitybank.com.au
AMP Bank	8% (A)	na	No	Monthly	No	No	8% introductory rate until 31 December 2008; then standard rate (currently 6%) applies	amp.com.au
NSW Teachers Credit Union	7%	na	No	Monthly	No	No	Available to all eligible Australian residents, not just teachers and their families	teacherscreditunion.com.au
Big Sky	6.5%	na	No	Monthly	No	No		bigsky.net.au
Police Credit	6%	na	No	Quarterly	No	No	Membership only available to certain groups, including members of police, emergency services, health services, public services, and their families	policecredit.com.au
Victoria Teachers Credit Union	6%	na	No	Quarterly	No	No	Home loan establishment fee waived for new home loan customers who had an FHSA with the credit union	victeach.com.au
OTHER ACCOUNTS (LISTED BY MAXIMUM INTEREST RATE)								
Hunter United Employees Credit Union (Hunter United)	7.07%	\$30 fee to close or transfer the account	No	Quarterly	No	\$30	Home loan application fee waived for Hunter United FHSA applicants	hunterunited.com.au
MyState Financial	7%	\$500 minimum starting balance	No	Quarterly	No	No		mystate.com.au
Wagga Mutual Credit Union	5.75% plus 1% bonus (see other details)	Standard interest rate below RBA cash rate; interest credited annually	No	Yearly	No	No	After four years Wagga Mutual home loan applicants receive an additional 1% interest, calculated on the FHSA's average annual balance over four years, and are eligible for a 0.5% discount off the standard variable home loan rate for two years	waggamutual.com.au
ANZ Bank	0.01%-6.5%	Standard interest rate below RBA cash rate; low interest in months when contribution is below \$10	No	Monthly	No	No	0.01% interest paid on full account balance in months where customer contributions are less than \$10, otherwise additional 6.49% bonus interest applies	anz.com
Hume Building Society	5.85%	Interest rate below RBA cash rate	No	Monthly	No	No		humebuild.com.au
Wyong Council Credit Union	5.75%	Interest rate below RBA cash rate; no interest paid until balance reaches \$1000	No	Quarterly	No	\$30	Credit union membership is only open to Wyong Council employees and their families	wccu.com.au
Commonwealth Bank	5.5%	Interest rate below RBA cash rate; interest credited annually	No	Yearly	No	No		commbank.com.au

TABLE NOTES

na Not applicable

* Rates are variable unless otherwise indicated.

(A) Introductory fixed rate. See Other details.

Our comparison includes all providers that had launched a

First Home Saver Account by 1 November 2008. Information is correct as at 1 November 2008. Interest rates are variable, before tax, and can change. They are in addition to the government's contribution.



Taking the Next G step

Readers asked CHOICE to look into the Next G network and its phones, so we tested 13 of the latest and most popular handsets in the bush and city. We've identified a variety of models to suit all types of users.

nutshell

► Handset choices for Next G users are better now than ever before, but deciding on the right model depends on how you use your phone.

► Next G is not the only network option from Telstra and may only be of additional benefit if you work, travel or live outside the major capitals.

Until recently, Telstra's main argument for going with the Next G mobile phone network was coverage, coverage and coverage. This was understandable, as even Telstra's competitors acknowledged the Next G network was more widespread than any other third-generation (3G) network. However, the handset choices were woeful compared with the other 3G carriers, and Telstra's Next G mobile plans could hardly have been described as the cheapest around.

When the CDMA network finally shut down in late April 2008, the choice for reception beyond the major population areas suddenly became Telstra's Next G or nothing. Satellite phones were an expensive alternative and not really an option if you spent only part of your time in the bush.

Thankfully, the handset choices for anyone considering the switch to Next G have improved markedly, with models to suit a wide variety of mobile functionality, and the plans are approaching the level of other 3G network providers, such as Optus, 3 and Vodafone.

Why go with Next G?

Next G services cover more of Australia than any other existing 3G network. Next G has completely replaced CDMA services so will work just as well as the previous CDMA network in regional areas as in the city, whereas most existing 3G networks work most effectively in metropolitan areas. Optus has announced a competing 900MHz-based system for areas outside the major metropolitan centres, but has not introduced anything at this time.

According to Telstra, wider coverage is not the only reason to consider its premium service. Telstra claims that the 850MHz frequency within which Next G operates delivers better coverage on highways, in lifts, buildings and multi-storey car parks than any other 3G network in Australia. Their argument is that the lower frequency (other 3G networks operate on 2100MHz) allows for deeper penetration through solid objects.

Using High Speed Downlink Packet Access (HSDPA) technology, the Next G network also provides faster downloads than other 3G networks, with typical user speeds of 3.6Mbps to 7.2Mbps rather than the 550kbps to 1.5Mbps on 3G networks. This could be useful when using your phone to access the internet in the country or when travelling. If you want to use this additional speed, check out the table on page 24 to see if the phone supports 7.2Mbps instead of the slower 3.6Mbps speed. >

Jargonbuster @!?

GSM Global System for Mobile communications. A second generation digital mobile phone network.

Tri-band Works on three different GSM frequencies, with more support for roaming, or working on networks in other countries.

Quad-band As for tri-band, plus the phone can also operate on the 850MHz frequency band used in parts of the US and Canada, or the 2100MHz 3G band.

3G Third generation or 3G describes wireless communication involving video phone calls and sophisticated internet services. However, video calling (including international calls), information services and some messaging services are only available in "video zones" in most parts of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Gold Coast, Adelaide and Perth.

HSDPA High Speed Downlink Packet Access. A software enhancement that provides faster download speeds for mobile networks.

CDMA Code Division Multiple Access. A type of digital mobile phone network that uses one frequency for all traffic. CDMA networks had the widest coverage throughout Australia, using the GSM networks when CDMA coverage was not available.

UMTS (Universal Mobile Telecommunications System) and (Wideband) **W-CDMA** are used to describe the system within which Telstra's Next G network operates.

User profiles

What handset is right for you? Apple Mac and Windows fanatics, "qwerty" key and touchscreen fans, office workers, music lovers are all catered for with the handsets on test. Some models can take extra punishment; several phones fit into multiple categories. The following rundown provides direction when choosing a handset.

MOBILE OFFICE/TECHNOPHILE

You love new technology and want to be able to read office documents such as spreadsheets, Word files and Acrobat PDFs, as well as share information quickly and easily via wireless technologies such as WiFi. Essentially, you want access to every piece of electronic information you need to do your job, either over the phone or online.

WHAT YOU NEED

- HTC Touch Diamond
- Apple iPhone
- i-mate Ultimate 9502
- Nokia N95
- Nokia E51



ENTRY LEVEL/TECHNOPHOB

A reasonably priced phone that provides all the necessary applications to keep your contacts under control, sends and receives an SMS, long battery life and gets good reception are your core requirements.

WHAT YOU NEED

- LG KF390
- Sony Ericsson Z750i
- Nokia 6120 Classic



HAPPY SNAPPER/MUSIC FAN

You don't see your phone merely as a means of communication; it needs to perform as an MP3 player and/or digital camera as well. The controls need to be readily available and the storage either easy to access or big enough to cope with large multimedia files. Strong integration with PC or Apple applications is also important to you, either to download music or upload photos.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Samsung SGH-U900T
- HTC Touch Diamond
- Apple iPhone
- Sony Ericsson W760
- Nokia N95



TRADESMAN/BUSH BASH

Tough and willing to take a knock, good reception and long battery life are your key requirements, without all the bells and whistles that may appeal to many other mobile phone users. Seals for dust and water are also an advantage.

WHAT YOU NEED

- LG KF390
- Sony Ericsson Z750i
- Telstra F159
- Telstra F165



All these phones operate in the 850MHz band, which has broader coverage than any other 3G network.

Profiles

78% SAMSUNG SGH-U900T

PRICE \$699

GOOD POINTS

- RSS reader.
- Speaker phone.

BAD POINTS

- Keypad can be annoyingly reflective.



76% HTC Touch Diamond

PRICE \$999

GOOD POINTS

- Quad-band GSM.
- RSS reader.

BAD POINTS

- Earpiece is very close to top of handset and the straight edge of the top feels sharp against the ear.
- No tactile feedback when screen buttons are pressed.



76% SONY ERICSSON Z750i

PRICE \$199 (on prepaid plan)

GOOD POINTS

- Supplied with a 128MB Memory Stick Micro.
- Quad-band GSM.
- RSS reader.
- Voice dialling.
- Speaker phone.

BAD POINTS

- Key labels are low in contrast.



75% APPLE iPhone 3G 16GB

PRICE Not available for outright purchase

GOOD POINTS

- Tri-band UMTS and quad-band GSM.

BAD POINTS

- No video recording.
- Ringtones can only be created using iTunes to purchase songs or by using Garage Band on a computer.
- No tactile feedback when screen buttons are pressed.



PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE								FEATURES				
Brand/model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)		Sensitivity score (%)	Battery life score (%)	Call sound quality score (%)	MP3 ease of use score (%)	Durability score (%)	Number of 20 min. calls made	Internal memory	Removable memory card type	Computer connection type	Headphone connection type
Samsung SGH-U900T	78	69	83	86	63	81	100	13	100MB	MicroSD		Proprietary	Proprietary
HTC Touch Diamond	76	66	84	77	72	77	100	10	4GB			Proprietary mini USB	Proprietary mini USB
LG KF390	76	69	89	73	63	80	90	9	50MB	MicroSD		Mini-B USB	Mini-B USB
Sony Ericsson W760	76	65	89	83	57	83	90	12	40MB	Memory Stick Micro		Proprietary	Proprietary
Sony Ericsson Z750i	76	66	90	77	58	80	100	10	32MB	Memory Stick Micro		Proprietary	Proprietary
Apple iPhone 3G 16GB	75	74	78	73	63	76	100	9	16GB			Proprietary	3.5mm
i-mate Ultimate 9502	75	64	83	86	62	66	100	13	128MB	MicroSD		Mini-A USB	2.5mm
Nokia E51	73	65	89	69	57	76	100	8	130MB	MicroSD		Mini-A USB	2.5mm
Motorola RAZR2 V9	72	67	84	73	53	70	90	9	45MB	MicroSD		Mini-A USB	Mini-A USB
Nokia 6120 Classic	72	63	88	60	65	75	100	6	35MB	MicroSD		Mini-A USB	2.5mm
Nokia N95	72	61	89	69	53	87	90	8	160MB	MicroSD		Mini-A USB	3.5mm
Telstra F159	71	64	89	95	55	10	100	17	60MB			Mini-B USB	Mini-B USB
Telstra F165	69	61	89	88	50	15	90	14	60MB	MicroSD		Mini-B USB	Mini-B USB

76% LG KF390

PRICE \$559

GOOD POINTS

- Speaker phone.
- Quad-band GSM.

BAD POINTS

- Nothing to mention.



76% SONY ERICSSON W760

PRICE \$619

GOOD POINTS

- Supplied with a 1GB memory stick micro.
- Quad-band GSM.
- RSS reader.
- Speaker phone.

BAD POINTS

- Key labels are low in contrast.



75% I-MATE Ultimate 9502

PRICE \$1099

GOOD POINTS

- Tri-band UMTS and quad-band GSM.
- Two-year warranty.
- Voice dialling.
- Speaker phone.

BAD POINTS

- Very small keys with convex keycaps so you can't use the stylus on them.
- No tactile feedback on screen buttons.
- Battery cover has to be removed to access memory card slot.



USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Ease of use: 25%
- Sensitivity: 25%
- Battery life: 20%
- Sound quality: 15%
- MP3 ease of use: 10%
- Durability: 5%

TABLE NOTES

Common features

All operate in the 850MHz band.

All, except the Apple iPhone, can be used as a mass storage device.

All support Bluetooth for hands-free talking with a Bluetooth headset.

All can charge via a USB connection, except the Nokias.

* Prices from Telstra.

(A) When purchased as pre-paid.

(B) Not available for outright purchase from Telstra.
ns not stated.

SPECIFICATIONS

	Screen resolution (pixels, WxH)	Camera resolution, (megapixels)	Telstra Blue Tick	Bluetooth stereo (A2DP)	GPS	WiFi	Max. HSDPA speed, Mb/s	Operating system	Handset type	Weight (g)	Dimensions (mm, HxWxD)	Contact	Price (\$)*
x 45	240 x 320	5		✓			7.2	Proprietary	Slider, vertical	114	106 x 50 x 17	samsung.com.au	699
x 57	480 x 640	3.2		✓	✓	✓	7.2	Win Mobile 6.1	Candybar, touchscreen	103	103 x 52 x 13	htc.com.au	999
x 42	176 x 220	2	✓	✓			7.2	ns	Slider, vertical	100	99 x 49 x 18	lge.com.au	559
x 45	240 x 320	3.2		✓	✓		3.6	Proprietary	Slider, vertical	104	104 x 49 x 18	sonyericsson.com.au	619
x 46	240 x 320	2	✓				3.6	Proprietary	Clamshell	108	98 x 49 x 22	sonyericsson.com.au	199 (A)
x 76	480 x 320	2			✓	✓	7.2	iPhone v2	Candybar, touchscreen	137	116 x 63 x 13	apple.com.au	(B)
x 57	480 x 640	3		✓	✓	✓	7.2	Win Mobile 6	Slider, horizontal	197	117 x 61 x 20	imate.com	1099
x 40	240 x 320	2		✓		✓	3.6	Symbian	Candybar	100	115 x 48 x 14	nokia.com.au	589
x 46	240 x 320	2		✓			3.6	Proprietary	Clamshell	130	104 x 54 x 14	motorola.com.au	589
x 40	240 x 320	2		✓			3.6	Symbian	Candybar	92	105 x 47 x 17	nokia.com.au	299 (A)
x 52	240 x 320	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	3.6	Symbian	Slider, vertical	123	100 x 55 x 22	nokia.com.au	709
x 40	220 x 176	1.3		✓	✓		3.6	Q'com	Candybar	154	123 x 52 x 23	zte.com.au	729
x 40	220 x 176	2	✓	✓			3.6	Q'com	Candybar	112	144 x 53 x 19	zte.com.au	529

HOW WE TESTED

Ease of use Our testers conducted a series of everyday tasks in the lab with each handset. These tasks included handling and grip of the phone, writing/reading an SMS, adjusting volume, entering/saving/retrieving a phone contact.

Sensitivity In conjunction with Josh Ciunelli and Ben White from *Farming Ahead* magazine (www.farmingahead.com.au), range testing was conducted at Oxley, NSW, which was chosen for its flat topography surrounding a Next G phone tower, and lack of interference from any nearby towers. No other mobile network reception was available in this area. The testers travelled away from the tower at set distance increments (using GPS) and placed two-way calls with the various handsets. At the limit of reception, some back-tracking was necessary to pinpoint the exact point at which a particular handset failed. All the phones with a Blue Tick (see below) classification performed well in this test.

Battery life is calculated based on the number of 20-minute calls, at hourly intervals, that could be made with a fully charged battery.

Sound quality was tested by a panel of three CHOICE staff. Each received one call made from a landline to each mobile handset, and another call made from each mobile handset to a landline desk phone. Between each test call, a reference call was made so they continually compared the sound quality they were hearing back to the same reference.

MP3 ease of use is calculated using an abbreviated version of the more extensive criteria that we use when testing MP3 players.

Durability was tested by placing the handsets in a test room with high temperature and humidity for a period of 56 hours. The phones were tested at 24-hour intervals to check they were still operational. Then they were subjected to a drop test, in which each handset was dropped onto a hard surface from a height of 80cm, four times on each of their six faces. See the drop test at www.choice.com.au/nextg.



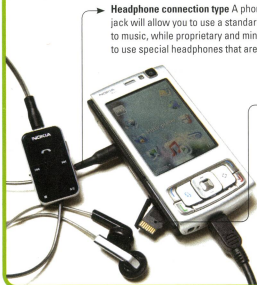
What to look for

FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS

- **Internal memory** Aside from keeping contacts and irritating ringtones, internal memory is also handy for recording still images and small video files.
- **Computer connection type** A USB connection of any type also lets you transfer files to and from your computer. Some models use a commonly available mini or micro USB connection and can have the phone appear on the PC as an external drive. Others operate as a camera or webcam.
- **Camera resolution** A two-megapixel resolution is generally the norm with the latest mobile phones, with some approaching dedicated digital camera status with five megapixels.

→ **Headphone connection type** A phone with a 2.5mm or 3.5mm jack will allow you to use a standard set of headphones to listen to music, while proprietary and mini USB connections force you to use special headphones that are not as readily available.

→ A **memory card** allows you to store photos and video clips and transfer them to a computer or printer. Not all the phones with a memory card slot provide a card, so you may have to buy one separately. Check to see the exact type of memory you'll need, as the cards are all tiny and look very similar but aren't interchangeable.



- **The Blue Tick** It may seem obvious, but 99% of the population is not the same as 99% coverage of Australia. If you happen to be among the 1%-2% of the population on the edge of mobile phone coverage, choosing the right handset is crucial. Telstra has introduced a Blue Tick program – handsets it is confident will provide superior reception (following a series of in house tests).
- **Bluetooth** A wireless radio technology that allows a range of electronic devices, such as mobile phones, mobile phone car kits, computers and PDAs, to communicate with each other easily over a range up to 10 metres. A recent version of Bluetooth (A2DP) allows you to listen to music in stereo without cables via a pair of Bluetooth stereo headphones.
- **GPS** While most of these phones provide support for online map services such as Google Maps, a dedicated GPS chip allows you to use your phone to find out exactly where you are without having to get the information via an often expensive data transfer from a mobile network provider.
- **WiFi capability** This allows you to browse the internet and send emails using your existing WiFi connection at home or at a WiFi hotspot when you're out and about. It generally costs a lot less than using a mobile phone network to transfer data.
- **Operating system** The operating system is a piece of software that allows a handset to operate not only as a phone but also perform tasks such as keeping contacts and controlling applications.
- **Handset type** The choices available are candybar (also known as a brick), slider and clamshell (also known as a flip phone).
- **HSDPA (also known as 3.5G)** This offers faster network performance than 3G, the current network speed king. It means faster video and music downloads to your mobile phone and is supported on Telstra's Next G network.

CHOICE verdict

Even though its handset range still lags behind other 3G carriers, there is no doubt that Telstra has improved its game when it comes to making the latest and greatest models available on the Next G network.

The iPhone from APPLE and other premium models from SAMSUNG, NOKIA, SONY ERICSSON and HTC show you no longer have to choose a boring handset just to get the best coverage. ■



Should your food be **less travelled** this Christmas?

CHOICE weighs up both sides of the 'food miles' debate so you can make informed decisions about your shopping habits.

nutshell

► "Food miles" measure the distance food travels between production and consumption. The food miles of a typical basket of groceries is equivalent to two loops of the globe.

► Food miles are not the sole indicator of a product's overall environmental impact, they're one component of the larger environmental picture.

The Kettle Chips packet says "made in Australia", with a Sydney address, but the ingredients come from everywhere: the potatoes are sourced from along Australia's east coast, the salt from Price, SA, and the sunflower oil is extracted in Newcastle and refined in Sydney. The packaging comprises fused layers of plastic and aluminium, with coloured ink for labelling. The plastic film is from Wodonga; the inks are made in Melbourne using components from India, China, the US and Europe; aluminium from Italy is added in Sydney, but the aluminium itself has probably been smelted from Australian bauxite.

At the end of all that, the chips are made in Shepparton, Victoria, then transported to your store. This example at Sydney's Powerhouse Museum illustrates the extraordinary number of "food miles" – the distance food is transported between production and consumption – an average product can clock up, even when it's "Australian".

"Food miles" advocates are calling for localised eating to counter the number of imported products in supermarkets. But is it even possible to eat well on food grown within 100 miles, or 160km, of where you live? CHOICE looks at the arguments for and against food miles and shows you how to apply the information to your shopping habits.

Many miles to go

In 2005, a British study broke down the dollar value of the environmental costs of producing and transporting food through the supply chain and coined the term "food

miles". The premise is that the further a product travels, the more fuel is required, so its greenhouse gas emissions are higher. By opting for an orange grown in Mildura rather than California, for example, you can reduce food miles from almost 13,000km to fewer than 600km. But is it really that simple? Researchers at the Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies (CERES) found that the contents of a typical Melbourne shopping basket has travelled a staggering 70,000km – almost two circuits of the globe. Our illustration, *Clocking up the kilometres*, on page 29, shows how far some common grocery items that could easily be in your basket have travelled.

How can I apply food miles information?

Read the label To cut your food miles without getting a headache, researchers at CERES advise opting for products from your state (or even country) and those with fewer ingredients. Fresh produce, for example, has to state a place of origin, so use what information you have, but our advice is to be realistic about it – you can't always make an accurate or complete judgment.

Waste not, want not In Australia, it's estimated we waste more than \$5.3 billion of food annually, which is a source of greenhouse gas emissions when it goes to landfill. So shop wisely, buy only what you think you can realistically use and incorporate leftovers into your repertoire of recipes.

Support businesses that work it out for you Some businesses cater for people trying to reduce their >

For goods produced identically, the equation is simple – the one that's travelled a shorter distance has the lower carbon footprint.



THE CASE FOR (+) AND AGAINST (-) FOOD MILES

+ Supporting food miles means supporting local food producers and connecting with your community

This isn't always the case, but may be if you shop at a local farmers' market [see CHOICE April 2008].

- Food miles are anti-trade and anti-development, because reducing your food miles means you stop buying imports

Is fair trade organic chocolate from overseas such a bad choice? And what would happen to Australian exports if food miles were scrutinised too closely overseas?

It's not just the distance that has an environmental impact, but how efficiently a product was transported – a plane travelling from Auckland to Sydney emits more greenhouse gases than a ship with the same cargo. However, consumers are unlikely to be told that. Tesco supermarkets in the UK introduced a voluntary air-freighted logo on products to help consumers identify products with higher environmental impacts.

A major UK organic certifier, the Soil Association, has been consulting on the issue of food miles, and has recommended changes to its organic standards aimed at reducing the amount of product that is air freighted into the UK and making sure ones that do come by air meet ethical trade standards.

+ Following food miles means you eat fresher food that's in season

Finding really fresh food is great for your health, however, frozen vegetables can have higher vitamin levels than their fresh equivalents that have been in the distribution chain for a few days. Food miles are not a reliable gauge of either freshness or what is in season when food can be transported a long way, quickly. In Australia you'll find locally grown strawberries in winter, but also apples that have been cold-stored for up to a year before they hit the shelves. So to eat seasonally, you need to know what should be in season.

- Food miles can reduce the variety in your diet

Experts agree that for good nutrition, we should eat a variety of foods. When Canadians Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon started writing their book, *The 100-Mile Diet (Random House, March 2007)*, they could source only a limited range of food within their self-imposed limit of 100 miles from home. Australians following a strict 100-mile [160km] diet would also feel restricted with some basic foods. Melbourneans couldn't access sugar and Sydneysiders would have to go without wheat.

+ Food miles reduce reliance on oil, so reduce carbon emissions

In the 1990s, when Cuba faced a severe reduction in oil imports following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, it reinvented its food production systems. Cubans turned to

organic fertiliser, animal traction, mixed cropping and biological pest controls. As a result, food production was brought closer to the people eating it. Urban gardens in the heart of Havana now produce half the vegetables consumed by the capital's two million residents.

For products produced identically, the equation is simple: the one that's travelled a shorter distance has the lower carbon footprint. But as with the case of the simple packet of potato chips, where a product is "made" rarely reflects the entire transport impact. When you factor in production as well as transport, the results can be surprising. An American study recently found that transportation accounts for only 11% of food's total greenhouse emissions and food miles – transport between the producer and retailer – is only 4% of total greenhouse emissions.

Sometimes more oil is used to produce a product locally. New Zealand researchers argued that lamb produced and sold in the UK requires four times the energy inputs than lamb produced in New Zealand and transported to the UK. So the local product has a larger carbon footprint.

- Food miles don't tell the whole environmental story

Food miles are just one piece of the grow-process-distribute-consume-dispose chain. Farms and factories where food is grown and processed have other environmental effects – impacts on wildlife, soil degradation and salinity. They may use harmful pesticides and fertilisers, which also require a huge amount of energy to make, and consume large amounts of water and energy, and generate waste.

+ The idea of food miles is catchy and easy to understand

There's no doubt food miles are an excellent indicator of the distance food travels from producer to consumer. And it's a simple thing to grasp. Rather than get hung up on what food miles don't achieve, researchers have used them as one aspect of a raft of environmental impacts of food production. The catchy terminology is a great way to raise awareness and question the way our food is produced.

- The food miles concept is hard to implement

The CERES study of a typical Melbourne shopping basket, while shocking, is difficult for the average consumer to replicate. If you want to become a "locavore", you would have a tough time finding out how far things have travelled. Inadequate food labelling means most products don't tell you everything you would like to know, as our sustainable seafood article showed [CHOICE, November 2008]. Strict proponents of the 100-mile diet go to a lot of effort, asking lots of questions and finding new places to source their food, to ensure their food miles are low.

Clocking up the kilometres

The further food travels along the supply chain, the more fuel is required for transport and so the higher its greenhouse gas emissions.

Source: CERES



< food miles. There's an eatery in Melbourne called the 100 Mile Café that focuses on sourcing local produce. Farmers' markets bring together food producers from the local area, so you don't have to expend energy looking for them (see CHOICE April 2008 for more information or check out www.farmersmarkets.org.au). Some food co-operatives and organic home-delivery companies strive to source food as locally as possible. There's also community-supported agriculture, where a local grower agrees to supply a group of consumers with a variety of freshly picked organic food for the entire season. In Brisbane, for example, there's Food Connect, and in Perth, Mimsbrook Farm.

Eat more food in season By eating seasonally you get the most flavour and nutritional value. You can find out more

about local seasonal availability of foods by contacting your state department of agriculture or the produce markets in your capital city. Alternatively, simply being aware of price changes helps – when produce is in season, it comes down in price. But remember to combine this with place of origin – we get cheap grapes in winter but they come all the way from the US.

Grow some of your own Grow herbs and greens in window pots on the balcony or planted in the backyard; or get access to more space by joining a community garden, where you can meet and learn from other gardeners. For more information about the Community Garden Network, go to www.communitygarden.org.au. ■

CHOICE Verdict

There is a misunderstanding that food miles were devised to show the total environmental impact of food production systems – but for that they're a poor indicator. They should be seen as one aspect of the bigger environmental picture. It's great that the food miles debate is generating discussion about issues ranging from pollution, economic diversity and food security to bigger questions about energy and mineral resource depletion, urbanisation, drought and climate change.



Cheers!

It's time to celebrate – CHOICE's wine experts give their verdict on top-scoring bubbly for every budget.

nutshell

► Sixty eight sparkling whites, reds and rosés expert-tasted and scored.

► No gold medal equivalent bubbly in this year's selection, but a few good ones of different styles.

When the number of sparkling wines in bottleshops suddenly increases, you know the festive season must be close. CHOICE tested 68 of the best-selling drops, including champagne, so you can buy the best value for any occasion. The table on page 32 has the results of the expert tasting. As price is usually a consideration, we split the whites into four price brackets, and there's a separate bracket each for sparkling rosés and reds.

Tasting and scoring wines

When judging a wine, expert tasters ignore personal preferences, looking simply for attributes that indicate the wine is well made, with no obvious faults. A score of 14-15 points (out of 20) indicates the wine is OK but nothing special. At wine shows, a score of 15.5-16.9 points rates a bronze medal, 17-18.4 points earns a silver and 18.5 points or more a gold medal.

We've printed the experts' scores and tasting notes, but to see whether ordinary consumers share their views, we also held a lay panel tasting with some of the wines the experts rated well or less favourably. For most of the wines, both groups agreed. Only once did their views differ markedly: for the sweet, muscat-style OMNI Blue, which the experts scored highly but the lay panel disliked. All wines were tasted blind (that is, no one knew what they were tasting).

Budget quaffing

The under \$12 price bracket has the largest number of bubbly (18). The three best, with scores of 16, are included in the CHOICE Selection. They're easy drinking, perhaps a little on the sweeter side, with flavours reminiscent of strawberries and cream, honey or limes. For a less sweet style, check out the tasting notes in the table – five more wines received a bronze-medal equivalent score of 15.5 points. Also scoring 16 points,

and included in the CHOICE Selection, are four of the 10 wines in the popular \$12 to \$20 price bracket, including the \$14 French GRANDIN Brut, which the judges rated much better this year than in previous ones.

Good value sipping

In the more up-market \$20 to \$40 price bracket, the top-scoring \$20.50 BROWN BROTHERS, at 18 points, impressed both the lay and expert panels – not bad for the cheapest Aussie sparkling in this range. By contrast, the only French sparkling in this bracket, the POL GESSNER NV, was considered "a bit clumsy", scoring just 16 – a disappointing score considering it was the most expensive bubbly in the bracket, at \$40.

Old World and New World styles

Champagne and premium sparkling wines are often bought for special occasions that justify the expense. So if you spend \$70, \$100 or \$270 on a bottle of pure indulgence, you want just that. Yet quite a few of the champagnes disappointed tasters, including the most expensive, the \$270 MOËT & CHANDON Dom Pérignon 1999, which was thought to lack balance and texture.

While none in the \$40+ bracket received a gold-medal equivalent score, the majority scored high enough for a silver medal at a wine show. This "yummy" elite, as one expert called it, featured predominantly champagnes, but also a premium Tasmanian sparkling (ARRAS).

The \$198 BOLLINGER Brut La Grande Année 1997 is a great example of the big and bold Old World-style of champagne made the traditional way (called *méthode champenoise*), displaying elegance, structure and complex secondary characters from bottle maturation. "As big a style as you're going to get," one expert taster remarked, but another found the savoury characters of both BOLLINGERS a little over the top.

CHOICE selection \$

Top-scoring wines from the four price brackets in the sparkling white range, plus the best sparkling rosé and red.



LESS THAN \$12

COCKATOO RIDGE Brut	\$10.50
MINCHINBURY White Seal	\$6.50
OMNI Blue	\$11.00

\$12 TO \$20

GRANDIN Brut	\$14.00
JACOBS CREEK CPN	\$12.00
LA VIE PNC	\$15.50
ORLANDO Trilogy PNC Pinot Meunier	\$15.50

\$20 TO \$40

BROWN BROTHERS PNC Pinot Meunier	\$20.50
DEUTZ Marlborough Cuvée Brut	\$24.50
SEPPELT Salinger Vintage 2005	\$23.50

MORE THAN \$40

BOLLINGER La Grande Année 1997	\$198.00
BOLLINGER Special Cuvée Brut	\$97.00
POL ROGER Vintage 1998	\$105.00

SPARKLING ROSE

YELLOWGLEN Pink	\$10.50
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SPARKLING RED

YELLOWGLEN Red	\$13.50
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CPW CHARDONNAY PINOT NOIR
PNC PINOT NOIR CHARDONNAY

Jargonbuster @!?

Most wine judging terms are self-explanatory, but some are more obscure – these explanations may help you understand some of the judges' comments.

Aldehyde A volatile substance with a characteristic nutty or sherry-like aroma. It's present in most wines, but too much of it produces an unpleasant taste or smell.

Brett Short for Brettanomyces, a group of yeast species that can produce farmyard or band-aid smells in a wine. In small amounts these smells can add complexity; in larger amounts they're rather unpleasant.

Two of the top-end wines in the \$20 to \$40 price bracket (DEUTZ and SEPPELT) were typically described as wines with "cool climate" freshness or "Aussie" flavour. Australian New World wines tend to be cleaner, fresher and more fruit-driven, and they're often made the cheaper way, in a tank, rather than in individual bottles.

Blush, pink and red bubbly

We also included the best sparkling rosé and red in our selection, but be warned, they're very much a style of their own. A sparkling rosé should be light and fruity, but the expert tasters found our selection of best sellers disappointing overall. As one pointed out: "There are some good rosés out there – but maybe they're just not getting into the bulk market."

A sparkling red, however, is generally more full-bodied, displaying ripe berry, prune and spice flavours. The experts rated one of them, YELLOWGLEN Red, as worth the equivalent of a silver medal. >

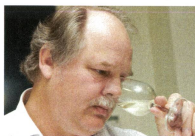
Meet the experts

Thanks to the four expert tasters who donated their time to taste the 68 bottles. They knew the price and style bracket in which the wine fell but not which wine they were tasting.



Garry Ford

Garry is with Hardy Wine Company in SA. He's a specialist in sparkling wines with 25 years' experience, including vintages in France, South Africa and Germany.



Phillip Gregory

Phillip has a Master of Wine Quality from the University of Western Sydney. He's been a wine judge, educator and participant in wine tastings and competitions.



Kirsten Potowski

Because of her passion for making sparkling wine, riesling, pinot noir and her love of travel, Kirsten has worked in the Rheingau region of Germany, in Lucca, Tuscany, and in Tasmania. She is currently a winemaker for Howard Park and MadFish Wines, Denmark, WA.



Paul Rogers

Paul is a wine lawyer and consultant to the Australian wine industry. He lectures on wine law at the University of Western Sydney and holds the Australasian Wine Masters Award from the International Wine Academy in San Francisco.

BRAND (IN RANK ORDER WITHIN PRICE BRACKETS)	SCORE OUT OF 20	PRICE (\$)	TM/BF	ORIGIN	TASTING NOTES
UP TO \$12					
Cockatoo Ridge Brut Cuvée	16	10.50	BF	Australia	Pale salmon pink; caramel, apricot Danish notes; strawberries and cream flavours, creamy texture, good length – slips down easily
Minchinbury White Seal	16	6.50		Australia	Pale straw-coloured; a touch of honey on the nose; creamy palate, floral, limey flavours – well balanced with a lingering, round taste
Omni Blue	16	11.00		Australia	Pale yellow; fragrant, musky, lemon zest aromas; sweet, luscious palate, good length – attractive drink in sweet muscat style
Great Western Imperial Reserve	15.5	7.00		Australia	Golden straw-coloured; dusty, mineral notes with little fruit on the nose; fruit, citrus flavours, good acid, rich texture – zesty, fresh
Hardys Regional Reserve Classic Cuvée	15.5	7.00		Australia	Pale green/straw-coloured; simple, vinous nose; lemon/lime flavours, sweetness at the end – crowd pleaser
Killawarra Classic Brut	15.5	11.50		Australia	Bright yellow straw-coloured; fresh fruit aromas; salty/savoury palate, tangy citrus flavours, slightly hard finish – good length
Matthew Lang Brut Cuvée	15.5	4.50		Australia	Pale straw yellow; limes and cold buttered toast aromas; nice texture, simple flavours, well balanced – fresh and sound
Omni NV	15.5	11.50	BF	Australia	Pale golden straw-coloured; light but dull nose; nutty flavours with lingering fruit – may have commercial appeal
Banrock Station The Reserve Pinot Noir Chardonnay	15	9.00		Australia	Pale lemon; some lime aromas but a bit cardboardy bland; creamy melon/citrus flavours, savoury length – lacked a little intensity
Carrington Brut Reserve	15	7.50		Australia	Pale yellow; honeydew melon, doughy aromas; lime and margarine on toast flavours – a bit short, but has flavour and palate presence
Carrington Vintage Brut 2007	15	7.50		Australia	Pale yellow; onion, sour citrus aromas; toasty flavours, lingering aftertaste of limes – commercially OK but a touch bland
Queen Adelaide Brut	15	6.00		Australia	Pale green/straw-coloured; shy, toasty and citrus/melon notes; creamy flavours, slightly bitter finish – a bit light on flavour
Renmano River Breeze	15	4.00		Australia	Light straw-coloured; passionfruit, lime and musky lolly notes; very fresh palate, apple flavours – looks good and shows promise
Seaview Brut	15	9.00		Australia	Straw yellow; aromas of limes and buttery toast; citrus flavours on a simple palate, lingering mouthfeel – simple
Seaview Grande Cuvée	15	9.00		Australia	Light yellow; sweet, toasty notes, a bit of age; rich, creamy palate, warm, toasty flavours – clumsy but has commercial appeal
Wolf Blass Eaglehawk Cuvée Brut	15	10.50		Australia	Pale golden-coloured; delicate apple, toasty notes; lively palate, a touch of sweetness, lacks length – suitable to have with fruit and cheese
Wolf Blass Red Label Chardonnay Pinot Noir	15	11.00		Australia	Golden straw-coloured; toffee/candied fruit aromas; simple palate, lemon sorbet mouthfeel – has flavour but not that attractive
Angas Brut Premium Cuvée	14.5	9.00		Australia	Rich golden-coloured; bready aromas with flinty/matchstick notes; burnt toffee/syrupy palate – lacks life, lacks acid, lacks bubble
BETWEEN \$12 AND \$20					
Grandin Brut	16	14.00	TM	France	Pale straw-coloured; honey, toffee fruits aromas, yeasty notes; nutty flavours, zesty finish – good texture, mouthfeel and length
Jacobs Creek Chardonnay Pinot Noir	16	12.00	BF	Australia	Light yellow; fresh citrus aromas, a touch of oak or yeast; lemon zest/citrus flavours, well-balanced palate – good food wine
La Vie Pinot Noir Chardonnay	16	15.50		Australia	Gold straw-coloured; citrus/floral and brioche aromas; secondary ripe citrus flavours, rich texture, good acid – slightly out of balance
Orlando Trilogy Pinot Noir Chardonnay Pinot Meunier	16	15.50	BF	Australia	Pale yellow; melon/citrus aromas, tropical notes; good, balanced flavours, nice texture – not bad for this bracket
Sir James Pinot Noir Chardonnay	15.5	14.00		Australia	Pale yellow; some development on the nose; rich texture, limey, citrus buttery palate, good balance – simple but good volume of flavour
Yellowglen Yellow	15.5	13.00		Australia	Pale yellow; strawberries and cream and oyster/mineral characters on the nose; zesty, salty/sweaty palate – lacks a bit of length but reasonable
Hardys Crest Cuvée	15	12.50		Australia	Light gold; stewed fruit aromas, green stalky characters; sweet textured palate, bitter finish, good length – good with oysters

BRAND (IN RANK ORDER WITHIN PRICE BRACKETS)	SCORE OUT OF 20	PRICE (\$)	TM/BF	ORIGIN	TASTING NOTES
Jacobs Creek Reserve Chardonnay Pinot Noir	15	18.00	BF	Australia	Pale yellow; a shy nose with citrus, melon and dirty/bretty characters; some citrus flavours, good mouthfeel – good food wine
Yellowglen Vintage Pinot Noir Chardonnay 2006	15	18.00		Australia	Light yellow; delicate nose with band-aid characters; flavours of candied fruit, cooked fruit and limes – lingering bitter finish
Henkell Trocken Dry-Sec	14	14.00		Germany	Pale yellow; savoury nose with obvious brett characters; simple gluey, potato flavours, band-aid characters – no fruit
BETWEEN \$20 AND \$40					
Brown Brothers Pinot Noir Chardonnay Pinot Meunier	18	20.50	BF	Australia	Pale golden; a French-like nose; yeast, citrus and slight oyster flavours, generous palate – good, cheap French non-vintage style
Deutz Marlborough Cuvee Brut	17.5	24.50	TM	NZ	Bright pale yellow; citrus nose with oak complexity; elegant palate, lingering acid, good length – good cool climate freshness
Seppelt Salinger Vintage 2005	17	23.50		Australia	Pale gold; delicate nose with apple, yeast and sweet floral aromas; zesty acid, good mouthfeel – strong cool climate flavour, a bit tannic
Chandon Vintage Brut 2005	16.5	34.00	TM	Australia	Pale yellow; great salty, yeasty and citrus nose; lemon/lime flavours, a hint of sweetness, fantastic length – some complexity
Grant Burge Pinot Noir Chardonnay	16.5	25.00	TM	Australia	Pale golden; well-defined citrus and slight caramel aromas; marmalade and candied fruit flavours – complex, well balanced
Bay of Fires Tigress Pinot Noir Chardonnay	16	25.00		Australia	Bright pale yellow; floral, chalky, unusual nose; fresh, balanced, citrus flavours, a touch of French pastry – good flavoursome drink
Ninth Island Chardonnay Pinot Noir Pinot Meunier	16	27.50		Australia	Bright yellow; slight candied/floral nose, chalky, simple palate, lemon tang, good length and spine – perhaps lacks acid definition
Pol Gessner Brut NV	16	40.00		France	Straw yellow; rich yeasty nose; strawberries and cream flavours, lacks length and acid – enough flavour but a bit clumsy
Yarra Burn Pinot Noir Chardonnay Pinot Meunier 2005	16	23.50		Australia	Green/gold; spicy, stewed apple aromas; simple palate with zesty acid spine and good length – lacks finesse
Yellowglen Vintage Perle 2004	16	26.00		Australia	Pale gold; warm toasty nose with hints of candied pith, oyster and salt; zesty, long, slightly dry palate – a pleasant style with food
Croser Piccadilly Valley Pinot Noir Chardonnay 2005	15.5	31.50		Australia	Pale golden; citrus, honey and toast aromas; bruised apples and lime/lemon flavours, fizzy, slightly metallic – cool climate Aussie
Jansz Premium NV Cuvée	15.5	27.00		Australia	Pale straw-coloured; candied warm fruit and floral nose; zesty citrus and melon flavours, good length – elegant acid balance
MORE THAN \$40					
Bollinger Brut La Grande Année 1997	18	198.00	TM	France	Rich golden; complex yeasty and oyster nose; big palate, rich, roasted nuts and salty flavours – good food wine, elegant finish
Bollinger Special Cuvée Brut	18	97.00	TM	France	Bright yellow; toasty, bruised apple nose with hints of aldehyde; fresh, savoury palate – good “drink now” style
Pol Roger Vintage 1998 Reserve	18	105.00	TM	France	Pale yellow; hazelnut and savoury nose; oyster/briny palate with hints of toast complexity – great flavour, rich, rewarding
Louis Roederer Brut Premier NV	17.5	99.00	TM	France	Golden straw-coloured; soft, layered citrus fruit and yeasty nose; palate explosion, zesty acid – well balanced, not overdone
Pol Roger Reserve NV	17.5	80.00	TM	France	Pale yellow; toasty nose with apple/iodine aromas; salty, zesty, savoury palate, lovely age, good length – interesting style
Arras Chardonnay Pinot Noir 2002	17	53.50	TM	Australia	Bright yellow; fruit, caramel aromas; Aussie style red fruit, lychee/ pinot driven, oyster/lanolin complexity – lacks touch of class
Moët & Chandon Brut Imperial NV	17	75.00	TM	France	Pale gold; fabulous, elegant nose with floral and sourdough aromas; fresh, sound, flavoursome palate – light, Old World style
Moët & Chandon Grande Vintage 2000	17	100.00	TM	France	Bright yellow; toasty nose with honey notes; textured savoury palate, good acid – good mouthfeel, some complexity
Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin Brut Vintage 2002	17	127.00	TM	France	Pale yellow; toasty nose with lemon/lime aromas; Aussie lychee flavours, slight oak complexity, good length – good food wine

BRAND (IN RANK ORDER WITHIN PRICE BRACKETS)	SCORE OUT OF 20	PRICE (\$)	TM/BF	ORIGIN	TASTING NOTES
Moët & Chandon Dom Pérignon 1999	16.5	270.00	TM	France	Pale yellow; toasty nose with hints of citrus and resin; full flavoured palate, zesty length and finish – lacks balance and texture
Piper Heidsieck Brut NV	16.5	50.00	TM	France	Pale yellow; good fruit aromas with some aldehyde and melon; zesty citrus flavours but dirty – good texture but sharp finish
Pommery Brut Royal NV	16.5	69.00	TM	France	Pale yellow; elegant, soft nose with yeasty/floral notes; zesty acid, delicate fruit, drying mid palate, short – a bit clumsy and fat
Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin Brut NV	16.5	75.00	TM	France	Light gold; warm caramel and couscous aromas; good palate with rich and textured floral/green lift – lacks some length for top end
Mixed Emotion					
Billecart-Salmon Brut Reserve	16-18.5	89.00	TM	France	Yellow; bready nose, complex aromas of iodine/oysters; earthy flavours, toasty overtones – nice Old World wine; lacks elegance
SPARKLING ROSE					
Yellowglen Pink	16	10.50		Australia	Baby pink; floral nose with rose petal, jasmine and talc notes; excellent fruit balance, good length – wine of the bracket
Carrington Blush NV	15.5	7.50		Australia	Pale salmon; closed, farmyard nose with smoky aromas; stewed fruit and rose petal flavours on a tight palate – Euro style, dirty
Jacobs Creek Sparkling Rosé	15.5	11.00	BF	Australia	Coral pink; salty and raspberry aromas; full palate with perfume/phenolic characteristics, chalky acid – slightly flabby
Orlando Trilogy Sparkling Rosé	15.5	17.00	BF	Australia	Coral pink; shy raspberry/rhubarb nose; hard, savoury palate with some floral characteristics – nothing amazing, clean, crisp, simple
Hardys Crest Sparkling Rosé	15	12.50		Australia	Light pink; lifted sweet floral/muscato nose; flavoursome sweet fruit taste, but lacks finesse – serve with fruit and cheese
Moët & Chandon Rosé Imperial	15	94.00	TM	France	Rusty garnet-coloured; unusual nose of burnt toffee, farmyard; sweet and sour palate, herbaceous characters – ordinary, clumsy
SPARKLING RED					
Yellowglen Red	17	13.50		Australia	Bright ruby garnet; spicy, prune and vanilla aromas; complex palate, a bit of fruitcake, a bit of Brett – soft, long, easy drink
Andrew Garrett Sparkling Burgundy	16.5	13.00		Australia	Cherry red; ripe ruby fruit and grassy green aromas; herbaceous savoury palate, sweet mint flavours – good with roast lamb
Chandon Pinot Shiraz	16.5	29.50	TM	Australia	Bright crimson; smoke and berry aromas; mushrooms/earthy style and rich fruit cake flavours – youthful with hints of complexity
Banrock Station The Reserve Sparkling Shiraz	16	9.50		Australia	Mid to deep red; nice red berries and spice on the nose; sweet palate of cedar and spicy chai and blackberries – well balanced
McGuigan Black Label Sparkling Shiraz	15.5	10.00		Australia	Cherry red; spicy, woody and burnt toffee aromas; fruit cake/brandy flavours, age complexity – lacks richness and generosity
Omni Red	15.5	11.00		Australia	Deep red; dark red berries and tobacco nose; ripe, rich fruit palate, hints of oak, touch drying – hints of age and complexity
Seppelts Original Sparkling Shiraz Vintage 2005	15.5	17.50		Australia	Dark ruby/garnet; spicy nose with hints of leather and ruby fruits; blackcurrants on the palate, oak tannin showing – good food wine
Seaview Sparkling Shiraz	13	9.00		Australia	Dark red; spicy blackberry nose with ethyl acetate notes; mousy, dry, bitter palate, lacks fruit, tannic finish – faulty

USING THE TABLE

Score Each expert gave the wines a score out of 20, according to the international show-scoring system for wines: 3 for appearance, 7 for nose (aroma) and 10 for palate. The score printed in the table is a consensus score they reached when discussing the wines after the tasting, still without knowing what the wines were.

Only in one case did a wine receive too wide a range of scores and no consensus could be reached, so we called it a *Mixed emotion*, listed the range of scores and included two overall comments to reflect the tasters' different views.

While the experts used the same benchmarks for judging all the wines, they were slightly harsher in their judgment of the more expensive wines. So the scores are only comparable within, not between, the brackets.

Price This is a median price we calculated from prices at five Sydney and two online wine retailers in August 2008. We found great price variations from

one shop to another, especially among the higher-priced wines, so it's worth shopping around – and watching out for specials.

TM/BF This information is taken from the bottle label, which usually indicates if a sparkling wine is made according to the traditional method (TM, otherwise known as *methode champenoise*) or bottle-fermented (BF, where the wine is transferred into a tank for clarification in bulk after the second fermentation in the bottle). A blank means it's bulk-fermented in a tank, or the winemaker hasn't indicated that it's bottle-fermented.

Tasting notes These are compiled from the experts' tasting notes on the wine's colour and appearance, nose, palate and overall impression. Combined with the scores they should give you a good indication of the wine's style, aroma and flavour. See *Jargon buster*, page 31, or go to www.choice.com.au and search "Sparkling wines" for more on the language used by wine judges.



Paws for thought

Getting a new dog can be an exciting time for the family – but how can you be sure your purchase is an ethical one?

nutshell

► Responsible dog ownership can reduce the rate of companion animals being dumped at the pound each year.
► Expensive “designer” dog breeds are becoming increasingly popular, but take care to ensure you’re buying from an ethical breeder.

Unlike the cute, fluffy animals we see in pet shop windows, when Louise first met her dog Keeper (pictured above) at an animal shelter, she was malnourished, scarred and still lactating from what was estimated to be at least her fifth litter of puppies in quick succession.

“My husband and I used to walk the dogs at the RSPCA and then one day I saw Keeper there and I just felt drawn to her,” Louise says. “She wasn’t in very good shape at all. She was really skinny, with scars all over her. Most of her teeth were broken and she was a relatively young dog, so the speculation was that she had been kicked or hit in the face.”

Sadly, there are many dogs like Keeper that are mistreated, kept in poor conditions and forced to breed litter after litter of pups in what are known as puppy farms (see *Puppy farms in Australia*, page 37). These pups are then taken from their mother, often too soon, and sold in pet shops, through newspapers or sometimes directly from the owner to unsuspecting consumers.

In Keeper’s case, her mistreatment has had long-term health effects. With proper veterinary care, she has settled into Louise’s family and is living a quality life – but not all surrendered dogs share the same happy ending.

Paying the price of pet ownership

Australia has one of the highest rates of pet ownership in the world, with an estimated 63% of households owning a pet and more than 50% having a cat or dog. We asked our readers to tell us about their pets, and dog owners responded overwhelmingly. (See *What readers think*, above right.) As an animal-loving nation, we spend an estimated \$4.6 billion on pet care products and services each year.

WHAT READERS THINK

In a CHOICE online poll, almost 90% of respondents said they prefer purebred dogs because of their predictable traits and the ongoing support they can get from registered breeders. Readers are also concerned about people buying pets irresponsibly because of the “novelty factor”. Most believe that whatever type of companion animal you choose to own, it’s important to first ensure you have a pet-compatible lifestyle.

While we’re willing to spend up big on our furry friends – buying single-serve organic meals, designer pet clothing and luxury pet care – there’s also an unacceptably high rate of pets ending up in shelters every year. In the 2007 financial year, the number of unwanted dogs received by the RSPCA rose by 2% to nearly 68,000, a third of which were put down.

To avoid contributing to the statistics, the RSPCA and Dogs NSW advise that consumers should consider not only the suitability of their lifestyles but also the ongoing costs before committing themselves to a new pet. Michael Linke, chief executive of RSPCA ACT, says a growing number of people are surrendering animals to the RSPCA on economic grounds. In particular, many people are forced to move out of the family home and into apartments due to the higher costs of living.

“It becomes obvious that many people are downsizing,” he said. “And in many cases the strata title owners and body corporate don’t allow pets.” In the ACT, almost one in five people who want to surrender a dog cite a residential move as the reason.

Count the cost before you commit



The cost of keeping a pet can be substantial. Apart from initial one-off costs such as the purchase price, registration, vaccinations, microchipping and desexing, there are also ongoing expenses including food, veterinary costs, registration and grooming, which can add up to over \$2000 per year.

Lifestyle factors are also important, so you need to ask:

- How much time can I commit to a caring for a dog?
- Do I have an active lifestyle?
- Are my living circumstances likely to change? That is, am I likely to travel, move house or have a baby?
- Is my house – or, if you are renting, landlord – pet-friendly?

Once you're sure about your decision, talk to other dog owners or go to websites such as www.petnet.com.au, which has a questionnaire to help you choose the right sort of pet for your lifestyle.

Pets for life, not just for Christmas



Buying a puppy for your friends or family members at Christmas may bring a big smile to their faces as well as provide an opportunity for young children to learn how to care for a dependent four-legged friend. However, too many of these gifts can soon find themselves unwanted, unloved and/or abandoned once the novelty wears off. The number of pets dumped at the RSPCA and other shelters increases dramatically over the Christmas period.

As RSPCA Tasmania highlights, "pets play an integral role in our lives, but we need to acknowledge that once we purchase a pet it will be a part of our life, possibly for the next 10 to 20 years." The organisation suggests that instead of buying someone a pet, people should consider giving a pet gift certificate. This way, the recipient themselves may choose an animal or breed that best suits their lifestyle and living situation. And if the recipient decides they're not yet willing or able to commit to pet ownership, they can use the certificate on RSPCA merchandise instead.

Designer frenzy

One of the biggest debates among dog lovers is the hybrid or "designer" puppy versus a purebred dog. In the last few years, so-called designer dogs (think "spoodle", "cavoodle" and "shnoodle") have become a sensation. The concept comes from mixing two purebred dogs to create first crosses for a specific purpose, such as a low-shedding coat or particular aesthetic qualities.

Unlike pedigree dogs, these fashionable pups are not considered breeds because they're not registered with the

Australian National Kennel Council (ANKC) and the breeders aren't scrutinised for their breeding practices. This is why buyers should be extremely careful when purchasing a hybrid puppy.

Hybrid breeders often promise qualities such as "hypoallergenic", "non-shedding" and "the best of both breeds" in their dogs. But how many of these claims are true?

The Australian Veterinary Association's Dr Anne Fowler says that while "hybrid vigour" does exist for cross-bred animals, genetics remains largely a numbers game. "I wouldn't think that getting the best of both breeds is going to happen every time. It comes down to the individuals and their genetics," she says. Responsible breeders screen their breeding animals for common genetic diseases to ensure they don't pass those genes to new generations.

Choosing the right breeder

An ethical breeder of purebred or hybrid dogs should provide a healthy environment for their dogs and provide you with ongoing information and support on how to care for your pet. This is why buying pets from a reputable breeder is advisable, as they are likely to be desexed, have had appropriate medical checks and be microchipped. You'll also know who their parents are, thereby reducing the risk of genetic trouble since the parents are screened for any potential hip, eye or other health problems.

What to look for A good breeder will ask you lots of questions to ensure your lifestyle is pet-compatible. They'll offer ongoing support and most will also offer to take the pet back any time you choose to part with it.

They will also provide you with the health and genetic background of the parents of puppies and ensure that pets are well socialised before they're sold. Where possible, meet both parents of the pup and visit the breeding premises to ensure the dogs were bred and cared for in a healthy environment. If a breeder refuses to let you visit before you make a purchase, alarm bells should sound.

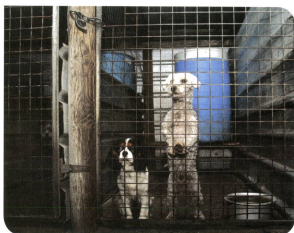
Many designer dog breeders now sell over the internet and while there are many reputable sellers, you run the risk of not getting the puppy you expect if you don't visit the premises personally.

Rescuing designer dogs



Sydney-based private rescue group Doggie Rescue rehouses about 1000 dogs each year from council pounds. Founder Monika Biernacki believes many cross-bred puppies are bred in an inappropriate environment and are mass-produced without having the care and nurturing that a companion animal needs. "I've been rescuing dogs for 15 years,"

Monika says. "When I started, I got mainly larger-breed dogs. And now I get nothing but a plethora of cross-bred, fluffy dogs."



'Puppy farming is the hidden industry behind the petshop window' – the majority of these premises hold 300 to 400 dogs.

► "People are often very shocked to know we are factory farming dogs in this country" – Debra Tranter, ALV

The Australian Association of Pet Dog Breeders (AAPDB) addresses quality control and animal welfare issues of hybrid dogs. To date, there are about 20 members in the association, all of whom must comply with a set of standards for the breeding and sale of their dogs, which promotes responsible breeding and pet ownership. AAPDB members also offer a take-back policy at any point of their animals' lives to avoid unwanted pets ending up in shelters.

Puppy farms in Australia

"Backyard" breeding is not illegal in Australia. Although all breeders are required by law to ensure they follow the animal welfare code, it's often difficult to monitor as there are no regular audits. This lack of oversight can lead to puppy farming.

"Puppy farming is the hidden industry behind the petshop window; not everybody realises it's out there," says Animal Liberation Victoria (ALV) campaign manager Debra Tranter. "People are often very shocked to know we're factory farming dogs in this country."

According to ALV, puppy farms are common in Australia. The operations range from 80 dogs to anywhere up to 1000. The majority of these premises hold about 300-400 dogs. Although all animal breeders are required to comply with the various state anti-cruelty acts, the RSPCA needs permission from an owner to enter a property, so it can only follow up complaints, not carry out routine checks.

Animal Welfare League SA (AWL) spokesperson Libby Gleeson says there's an overpopulation issue surrounding the welfare of pets. "In SA alone we receive up to 20,000 lost and abandoned cats and dogs a year," she says. "But as long as people continue to buy animals and not have them desexed, vaccinated and microchipped, and the demand is still there, then breeding will continue."

Rescuing a pet has its rewards

Adopting a dog or cat from an animal shelter or RSPCA often costs less than buying one from a breeder (\$300 for a dog, whereas a breeder can charge anything from twice as much) and you'll be offering animals a second chance at a happy life. According to the Animal Welfare League, animals that are fit for adoption have been through health and behavioural checks looking for potential problems, such as food aggression or the chasing instinct, before they are recommended to families. The animals are desexed, vaccinated, microchipped and wormed.

The AWL's Lort Smith Animal Hospital in Melbourne recently teamed up with the pet store chain Pets at Home, which no longer sells dogs and cats, but adopts out AWL's rescued animals.

Alternatives to buying a pet

If you don't have the time or space to commit to owning a dog, volunteering at a shelter as a dog walker or "cat cuddler" could be the solution. Alternatively, foster carers provide temporary care and shelter for a surrendered pet before a permanent home is found. The foster carer also help place the pet in a new home, which can take anywhere from several days to a few months. ■



WEBSITES TO VISIT

- www.rspca.org.au.
- www.paws.com.au.
- www.petrescue.com.au/shelter_directory/
- www.dogmatch.com.au.
- www.animalwelfareleague.com.au.
- www.nkc.org.au.
- www.dogsnsw.org.au.
- www.petnet.com.au.
- www.doggierescue.com.
- www.dogzonline.com.au.

'Do you want an **extended warranty** with that?'

Are you being served or served up with this question? CHOICE finds some retailers might be capitalising on consumer confusion.



nutshell

► Always ensure you know what the extended warranty covers – don't rely on the salesperson's knowledge.

► Your right to repairs or replacement of a faulty item could be covered under the statutory warranty that covers all purchases.

You've just made the big decision; the salesman grins and leads you to the cash register under bright store lights. You produce your credit card, gulp and get ready to pay for thousands of dollars worth of TV. Just before you sign on the dotted line the salesman asks if you'd like to take out an extended warranty. He says it will give you another four years' protection should anything go wrong and will only cost an extra couple of hundred dollars.

Suddenly the extra money doesn't seem much to help protect your expensive investment, so you agree. After all, you think, things don't seem to be made to last these days and it's good to have some protection. Right?

Not necessarily. You could be buying insurance you don't need. Firstly, most appliances are covered by a manufacturer's warranty, usually one year for TVs and up to three years for some LCD and plasma models. And contrary to common belief, most products, especially big-ticket items such as washing machines and TVs, are quite reliable.

Finally, if something goes wrong with your TV outside the warranty period you may be covered under the federal Trade Practices Act, which provides all consumers with a statutory warranty whenever they buy any kind of goods or services (see *Your rights under a statutory warranty*, page 40).

So are people being pressured by retailers into buying insurance they don't need? To find out, CHOICE and the NSW Office of Fair Trading conducted research via an online survey and a shadow shop of electrical retail stores.

CHOICE members say the pressure's on

Our survey revealed consumers are regularly being offered extended warranties: of the 570 people we found had been offered an extended warranty, 95% said it had happened more than once and 33% said they had been offered one more than five times. Our survey also showed that consumers sometimes feel pressured to buy extended warranties, with more than a third of the 375 respondents who said they had gone on to buy an extended warranty reporting some degree of pressure.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE RETAILER

Before you purchase an extended warranty, insist on all the terms and conditions in writing. Once you have the fine details in print, look out for the following points.

- What are the terms and conditions?
- How long is the extended warranty?
- Who is providing the warranty? Is it the retailer or a third party?
- Is there a cooling-off period? What do you have to do if you want to cancel?
- Does the warranty cover a replacement if needed or does it only cover repairs?
- Is the number of repairs or the cost of repairs limited? Do you have to deal with the repairer? Do you have a choice of repairer?
- What about depreciation? Will you get full replacement value?
- Is freight covered if your item needs to be sent away to be repaired? If it is, is there a weight limit?

94%

The percentage of televisions that didn't need to be repaired in the previous 12 months.

Source: 2007 Product Reliability Survey

Why do people buy extended warranties?

A fear of breakdowns is what drove 69% of our survey respondents who had purchased an extended warranty to buy one—they believed the cost to repair the product would be too high—while 24% felt that the manufacturer's warranty didn't provide enough cover.

CHOICE regularly conducts reliability surveys on various products such as washing machines, TVs, digital cameras and ovens to put this theory to the test. The great news is that most products are, in fact, reliable. Our 2007 survey showed that more than 90% of TVs, digital cameras, washing machines and refrigerators purchased by our respondents since 2000 hadn't needed to be repaired in the previous 12 months. To read our reliability reports in detail, go to www.choiceextra.com.au and look under "Reliability" in the index.

It may be worth buying an extended warranty for some products, such as computers, which can be less reliable than other appliances. Or, if you're thinking of buying a brand or technology that's new to you or a particularly expensive item where you're worried about faults occurring down the track, an extended warranty may be worth it.

However, is the cash register really the right place to make such an important decision? CHOICE doesn't think so.

Statutory rights and wrongs

If you have a problem with a product, check if it is covered under the manufacturer's warranty. If not, and you feel you are covered under a statutory warranty (see *Three types of warranties*, right), the first port of call is to the retailer but if it's not possible to resolve it there, you'll need to contact the office of consumer affairs or fair trading in your state. It may then get referred to the small claims tribunal.

Kay Ransom, Chair of the NSW Consumer, Trader & Tenancy Tribunal, says that most general consumer claims only take about four weeks to be heard, and about 80% of cases are resolved to both parties' satisfaction.

However, Gerard Brody from the Consumer Law Action Centre says there are problems with enforcing statutory law and it can be arduous for consumers who are required to do most of the footwork. "Often that involves a cost and if it's a small item, it might not be worth all the effort." >

WHAT OUR SHADOW SHOP REVEALED

We engaged a shadow shopper to buy eight LCD TVs and six digital cameras at 14 major retail stores in Sydney. She was instructed by us to accept the extended warranty at an additional cost.

- The offer was mainly made to her as a "yes" or "no" question with no extra information provided until the shadow shopper asked for more information.
- On five of the 14 occasions she was offered an extended warranty she felt she wasn't told enough information about what it covered. In one instance she was simply told "this is better than the manufacturer's warranty", while another salesperson said "it was a good idea" to buy one.
- On three occasions the sales assistants weren't clear about whether the extended warranty was provided by the retailer or by a third party.



Most appliances are already covered by some kind of warranty – and the big-ticket items are more reliable than you might think.

THREE TYPES OF WARRANTIES

1 Manufacturer's warranty This is also known as a voluntary or express warranty and is the sort most consumers are familiar with. It's usually provided as a booklet that comes with the product, but may only be available in certain circumstances, and is often for a limited time.

2 Statutory warranty Your rights under this type of warranty are implied; that is, you don't receive paperwork stating what's covered and what's not [see *Your rights under a statutory warranty*, page 40].

3 Extended warranty An additional warranty retailers try to sell you which may or may not extend the manufacturer's warranty. Some extended warranties may only replace the product or refund customers based on annual depreciation of the product. This means the product you get as a replacement may be inferior to the one you originally bought or you may be refunded less money than what you paid.

Any product you buy should meet a basic level of quality and perform as expected.

< Most experts we spoke to agree it is a confusing area to understand, however, new initiatives are being considered. The National Education and Information Advisory Taskforce is a working party made up of each state's fair trade regulators, and its task is to improve consumer awareness and the process of using statutory rights.

In the meantime, NSW Fair Trading Minister Virginia Judge says consumers shouldn't be afraid to invoke their rights as they now stand. "If a product is faulty you are entitled to seek a refund. It's important for people to know what their rights are and what course of action they can take if they need. It's your right as a consumer."

What is your experience of extended warranties?
Join our online debate at www.choice.com.au/extendedwarranties. ■

69% The number of survey respondents who purchased an extended warranty because they thought the cost to repair their appliance would be too high.

YOUR RIGHTS UNDER A STATUTORY WARRANTY

Under Australian law, all goods (except goods at auction) are covered by a statutory, or implied, warranty. This means the product you buy should be of "merchantable quality"; that is, it should meet the basic level of quality and performance expected, considering its description, price and other relevant circumstances.

- In the case of a major TV purchase you are entitled to a refund if, for example, it develops a serious fault after 15 months when it can be expected that a TV should last at least 10 years. However, a consumer would probably be more than satisfied with a two-year run from a \$10 watch, but not if it cost \$2000.
- If a product fails to live up to these expectations and can't be rectified within reasonable time limits, you're entitled to seek to have the contract cancelled, return the goods and get a refund.
- Under a statutory warranty, any problem you have with a product is the seller's responsibility, not the manufacturer's. If you have a problem refunding or exchanging an item and you have tried but failed to negotiate with the retailer, contact the fair trading office in your state for help and advice.

CHOICE verdict

More than a third of those in our survey who bought an extended warranty reported feeling some pressure to buy it, while our shadow shopper reported poor information from sales staff, accompanied by factually incorrect statements about extended warranties. The confusion surrounding statutory warranties has allowed retailers to step in and exploit poor consumer understanding of the issue.

Consumers shouldn't be pressured into buying an extended warranty. We think the law needs to change to give consumers better information and better protection when purchasing an extended warranty. Consumers should also be given the opportunity to

purchase extended warranties within 30 days of purchasing the goods, as well as adequate termination rights on extended warranties that are purchased.

Don't be tempted to rely on the advice of the salesperson. Our research revealed that sales assistants often give incorrect and at times completely misleading information. Keep in mind that an extended warranty is not actually an extension of the manufacturer's warranty, as the terms and conditions are different. Better information about statutory warranties is needed at the point of sale to ensure that consumers have all the information they need to make an informed purchase without pressure.

Washed up

In October 2005, Megan Watson bought a front-loading washing machine from Harvey Norman. She elected to buy an extended warranty for \$50. She was told this, combined with the manufacturer's warranty of two years, would give her cover for seven years.

In January this year when the manufacturer's warranty had expired, the machine started vibrating badly. Megan contacted the extended warranty company to have it fixed. After three weeks of chasing both the warranty company and the repairer, thanks to a communication problem between the two parties, the machine was repaired, returned and installed.

Within a week water leaked onto the floor and there were problems with the controls. When Megan contacted her warranty company she was shocked to hear she had only \$470 left on her extended warranty, which wouldn't be enough for the current problem.

Megan hadn't checked the fine print when buying the extended warranty, which stated that it would only cover the cost of repairs equal to the cost of the machine – \$1295. The first round of repairs had cost \$825, including a \$110 quote fee. Megan says she is now stuck with a very expensive washing machine, which is malfunctioning after less than three years and she would be very unlikely to buy an extended warranty again. "The frustrating thing is that they keenly sell you the warranty but don't spell out its limitations. Now I have a machine that is unreliable – and no money left to fix it."

Megan is currently pursuing the issue with the NSW Office of Fair Trading and hopes she might have some success using her statutory rights. We'll keep you updated on her progress at www.choice.com.au/extendedwarranties.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MEGAN

On test

Home entertainment,
whitegoods, household
and personal appliances
— they're all tested here.



Inside

46 Camcorders



50 Small barbecues



53 Kitchen scales



Plus

56 Rechargeable batteries

58 Oven cleaners

"CHOICE it" before you buy it www.choice.com.au

CHOICE has its own testing laboratories, where experienced technical staff put products through their paces. We use test methods from Australian standards, as well as developing our own in order to match the way consumers use a product in reality. We buy the products we test, to maintain our independence from manufacturers and so that we know what you're faced with in the shops. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.



CHOICE Best Buy CHOICE calls a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Best Buys.



CHOICE Green Buy CHOICE calls a product a Green Buy if it delivers both good quality and environmental performance at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Green Buys.



CHOICE Video When you see the CHOICE Video icon, you can find more information about that story at choice.com.au.



Size matters

When a salesperson tells you a higher resolution TV is worth the extra money, should you believe it? Our tests showed not with 80cm televisions – keep your cash in your wallet.

nutshell

- We found there's no need to spend money on resolution you don't need.
- Picture quality in the TVs on test is generally very good to OK, but sound is disappointing.

There's an assumption in the marketplace that higher resolution equals better picture performance. But as the song says: "It ain't necessarily so."

We compared the performance of seven lower resolution 80cm TVs against three high resolution models and found resolution has little influence on picture quality. Apart from the SAMSUNGS, all brands with two models tested have the same picture quality scores for their 1920 x 1080 and 1366 x 768 models, which is why our *What to buy* list includes only the lesser priced, lower resolution models for PANASONIC and SONY, plus the LG. The higher resolution SAMSUNG actually performed worse overall than its lower resolution counterpart. Its picture is more likely to show faults, such as banding across gradations of colour, and its colour edges are less well defined. It's still an OK performer overall, but as with all the higher resolution models, with anything from \$200 to a \$670 difference in price we suggest you save your money.

Digital tuner performance

Digital tuners pick up the signal from free-to-air digital broadcasts. They tend to deliver either a very good picture, nothing, or an image so badly broken up that it's unwatchable. So it's important to know how they will perform in difficult circumstances.

All the tuners in this test will handle most problems quite well. The SHARP Aquos LC-32D53X is most likely to have a problem in particularly difficult circumstances, such as where there's a lot of electrical equipment in use nearby, but it's still an OK performer.

They're all high definition tuners which means they can accept and display both high and standard definition (SD) channels. Some free-to-air broadcasters are introducing different programs on their HD and SD channels, so an HD tuner has some advantage over an SD in that it gives you more choice of programs, as well as higher resolution and better sound quality.

How much power do they use?

The SONYs and PANASONICs use less than a third of a watt in standby mode. The others all manage to use less than a watt, but the LG and SAMSUNGS are closer to 0.75W.

Although the amount of energy used by each TV is small, it adds up quickly across the nation. The more we can reduce the constant load on the electricity grid the less demand there will be for base load power.

The new standard for measuring TV energy when in use requires "out of the box" settings, so our power consumption figures in the table on page 44 take this into account.

All the TVs in this test are LCDs, which generally consume less power than plasma TVs of the same size, but there's a clear indication that higher resolution will mean more power use when running. Although the increase isn't great, it's yet another reason not to spend extra on resolution you don't need.

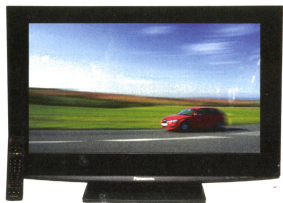
Out of the box

Most TVs are set in the factory to give a very bright display. This is done to try to make sure the TV isn't overshadowed by other TVs in a showroom. They can, however, provide a better picture and power consumption with some basic changes to their brightness and contrast settings. Some LCD TVs allow you to vary the backlight intensity, which can improve picture and power consumption in some situations.

The simplest way to make changes is to choose from the options in the "picture mode" menu. These usually have names such as dynamic, standard, normal or vivid, as well as many others which may or may not actually give you an idea of what changes they make to the picture. Take time to cycle through them all to see which one is best for your viewing conditions.

Some TVs also offer an energy saving mode. It may look a bit dull compared with the very bright, out of the box settings, but give it a little time to see if you can get used to it. You can always switch back to a brighter setting if necessary. >

What to buy



72% PANASONIC Viera TX-32LXD80A

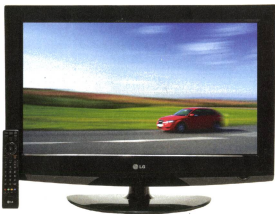
PRICE \$1329

GOOD POINTS

- Very good picture quality.
- Easy to use remote control.
- Easily accessible on/off switch so you can save power by not leaving the TV on standby.
- Digital TV tuner performance is among the better ones for handling a range of signal conditions.
- Remote control can be used for Panasonic VCRs and DVDs.
- SD Card port for viewing JPEG image files.

BAD POINTS

- No "previous channel" key on remote control.
- No child lock or parental rating lock.



68% LG 32LG30D

PRICE \$1099

GOOD POINTS

- Very good picture quality.
- Easy to use remote control and onboard controls.
- Very easy to use onscreen user interface.
- Remote control can be used to control other devices.

BAD POINTS

- Poor sound quality from its own speakers.
- No headphones socket.



69% SONY Bravia KDL-32S4000

PRICE \$1399

GOOD POINTS

- Very good picture quality.
- Easy to use remote control.
- Very low standby energy consumption.

BAD POINTS

- Poor sound quality from its own speakers.
- Onscreen menu characters are very small.

Given a difference in price of up to \$670, we suggest you save your money and opt for a lower resolution model, which in some cases actually performs better than its higher resolution counterpart.

About the rest

Any of the TVs in this test would be a reasonable buy at the right price.

- Only the PANASONICs can produce OK sound – the rest are hard on the ears, particularly when the volume increases.
- The PANASONIC Viera TX-32LXD800A and SONY Bravia KDL-32V4000 are equal scorers with their cheaper models in the *What to buy* list.
- The SAMSUNG LA32A650A1F has more noticeable picture faults than the lower resolution SAMSUNG LA32A450C1D and its onboard controls are hard to use. However, its remote is very easy to use with a handy backlight for use in dark rooms. Both are OK overall performers.
- The TOSHIBA Regza 32AV500A has some noticeable picture faults; its onscreen controls are hard to see at times and it has no inputs accessible from the front. Also, it can't tune to the upper end of the analog TV spectrum. This isn't a problem for digital reception, but it's not suitable for use in blocks of flats that use Channel 75 when sharing an aerial.
- Both SHARP TVs have OK picture scores, but neither has inputs accessible from the front. Nor are they very easy to use. The Aquos LC-32D33X has very small onscreen menu characters. The Aquos LC-32D53X has no onboard control to access the onscreen menu and couldn't display a 1080p signal. However, if you switch the player's output to 1080i format it will work, but this seems an unnecessary inconvenience to us.

What to look for

ESSENTIAL FEATURES

- **Built-in digital tuner** so you don't have to buy a set-top box to receive digital TV. For most people standard-definition (SD) or high-definition (HD) doesn't matter, as not much HD TV is being broadcast, but there will be more in future. All the TVs on test are HD and have HD tuners.
- Look for **easy-to-access** sockets that allow you to get to the connections for DVD players, cable TV and other devices, particularly if you plan to mount the TV on a wall. Some have additional inputs, usually on one side.
- Check that the **input connections** on the TV match the output on the devices you want to hook up to it, such as DVD player/recorder, cable TV or games console, and that there are enough connections for all the devices you want to attach at the same time.
- **HDMI** (high-definition multimedia interface) is a digital connection for sound and video in one cable. Even if you don't have any gadgets with HDMI output now, expect more devices to use them in future, so it might be worth having at least one HDMI socket on your TV. If you want to use your TV as a computer display, you'll need a DVI input for newer computers or a VGA input for older ones. Or you could use HDMI if your computer has an HDMI output.
- Look for a **remote control** that's easy to read with large, well-spaced buttons and clear labels.
- **On-screen menus** should be easy to read and understand without having to resort to the manual.
- If you're likely to lose the remote control, choose a TV with easily **accessible controls on the TV** itself.
- All models in this test are **wall-mountable**. However, none comes with wall mounts, so you'll have to buy a separate kit.

"Noise" usually appears in parts of images where tones progress smoothly from dark to light. It looks like lots of pixels are moving about in a liquid.



Banding tends to happen in these areas when the camera is panning across the image. Colours are in distinct bands rather than smooth gradations.

Plastic skin is where there appears to be a film over the skin's surface that moves unnaturally.

HOW TO COMPARE TVs IN THE STORE

- **Viewing angles** have improved in newer models, but some still have a dimmer picture when viewed from different angles, which is important if several people will be watching the TV at once. Stand square to the screen then walk sideways until you notice the image quality drop. If you normally sit lower than the screen, make sure you try looking up at it as well.
- Watch a **variety of programs** in the shop. Look for natural skin tones and texture on a person in a studio setting, such as a news presenter.
- Check the picture for a **colour cast**, such as a pinkish or greenish tinge that can't be fixed by adjusting the controls.

PRODUCT		PERFORMANCE						FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS		
		Claimed resolution (pixels)	Overall score (%)	Picture quality score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Energy score (%)	DTV tuner performance score (%)	Swivel	Front/rear HDMI inputs	Front/rear USB port	Energy consumption when in use (W)	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)*
Brand/model (in rank order)													
Panasonic Viera TX-32LXD80A		1366 x 768	72	86	55	64	68	81		1 / 1		106	58 x 82 x 22.5
Panasonic Viera TX-32LZD800A		1920 x 1080	72	86	55	64	63	83	✓	1 / 2		119	58 x 82 x 22.5
Sony Bravia KDL-32S4000		1366 x 768	69	84	45	65	68	78	✓	1 / 2	1 / 0	106	58.5 x 81 x 24
Sony Bravia KDL-32V4000		1920 x 1080	69	84	50	66	59	79	✓	1 / 2	1 / 0	129	58 x 79.5 x 24
LG 32LG30D		1366 x 768	68	82	40	68	68	77	✓	1 / 2		106	60.5 x 80 x 23
Samsung LA32A450C1D		1366 x 768	66	81	40	62	60	84	✓	1 / 2		125	57.5 x 80 x 23
Samsung LA32A650A1F		1920 x 1080	60	63	40	68	53	85	✓	1 / 3	1 / 0	141	58.5 x 81 x 25
Toshiba Regza 32AV500A		1366 x 768	60	63	45	57	66	79		0 / 2		110	59 x 79 x 31
Sharp Aquos LC-32D33X		1366 x 768	59	69	35	53	60	78		0 / 2		127	58 x 77.5 x 23
Sharp Aquos LC-32D53X		1366 x 768	58	69	40	55	52	69		0 / 2		145	59 x 79.5 x 25

HOW WE TESTED

Picture quality Our testers set up all 10 models close together and adjusted their controls to get the best picture quality possible. They kept the lighting in the room low and the sound muted, and three experts watched a variety of footage (from Blu-ray and DVD movies as well as a computer game) simultaneously on all the screens. To evaluate the picture quality and rate it out of 10:

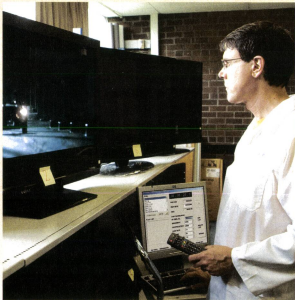
- They checked how well each TV produces **accurate colour**.
- They displayed a number of **test patterns** from a high-quality DVD player, to measure if any of the picture was cut off at the edges and checked for distortions, such as circles that aren't round or wavy lines that should be straight.
- They played **movies and other footage** to check the screen's ability to produce images without colour-banding, jerkiness, blurring, vibration and colours bleeding in high contrast or very intensely saturated parts of the image. They also checked that there were no trails behind fast-moving objects on the screen.

Sound quality They listened to movies and music to check for rattles, hums, hisses or distortion, as well as making a judgment on how well the high and low sounds were produced.

Ease of use They used the remote control, front panel controls and onscreen display to perform a number of common tasks. They looked for logical menus and clear labelling, buttons and controls that are easily identified and can be used without interfering with other controls. Whether the TV had an inbuilt digital tuner was also included in the ease of use score – they all do.

They checked the **HD digital tuner** on all the models for reception performance in areas with a good quality signal, as well as in areas where reception was less than ideal and where reception might be affected by things such as a dryer or vacuum cleaner operating in the house.

Energy score Our testers used a power meter to measure the power consumed by the TV when in use and on standby.



The quality of the image on an HD TV screen is not necessarily tied to the number of pixels; colour accuracy and smooth transition between colours are far more important.

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Picture quality: 35%
- Sound quality: 20%
- Ease of use: 20%
- Energy score: 15%
- Digital tuner score: 10%

Price Recommended retail, as of September 2008.

TABLE NOTES

* Rounded up to the next centimetre or half centimetre, with the base attached and all protruding parts included. Power cord and connecting cables excluded.

	Price (\$)
panasonic.com.au	1329
anasonic.com.au	1799
ony.com.au	1399
ony.com.au	1799
e.com.au	1099
amsung.com.au	1329
amsung.com.au	1999
shiba.com.au	1299
harp.net.au	1099
harp.net.au	1299

HIGH-DEFINITION MYTHS

It's easy to get confused in the HD world. High definition for TV sets refers to the number of pixels on the screen – anything including and above 1366 x 768 is generally considered HD. On the other hand, high-definition sources such as Blu-ray and HD TV broadcasts, can be anything from 720 x 576p at the low end of HD broadcasting up to Blu-ray with 1920 x 1080p. The "p" stands for progressive which gives a more stable picture than an interlaced picture which usually has an "i" after the number.

There isn't really a simple definition for HD TV sets either. However, 80cm or smaller screens with 1366 x 768 pixels or more should be capable of delivering an acceptable image from an HD source. The size of the screen has to be taken into account because it influences the size of individual pixels.

The quality of the image is not necessarily tied to the number of pixels. Colour accuracy, smooth transitions between colours and blacks that don't look muddy or lose detail are far more important. The TV's picture processor handles these functions, and more pixels may actually make it harder for the processor to deliver a good image.

This is assuming that most people sit about two metres from the screen. At this distance, we think 1920 x 1080 on an 80cm TV is overkill. To get some benefit from this resolution you'd have to sit less than 1.25 metres from the screen.



Preventative measures

With the move away from video tape to removable storage and hard drives, it's now more important than ever to keep your digital memories safe.

nutshell

- ▶ Hard drives and removable memory are now the two most popular options for DV camcorders.
- ▶ Backing up your video will prevent a mishap from turning into an irrecoverable disaster.

In the past, almost all video cameras recorded to tape. Even when we moved into the digital video (DV) age, we still captured the video to tape. But as the latest roundup of camcorders shows, tape-based models are now in a minority. Of the 29 camcorders on test, only five models use tape and of the 10 newly tested models since August 2008, only one uses tape. Most camcorders record video either to removable storage cards or onto an internal hard drive.

Purchasing extra cards each time you want to record more video, however, can be expensive. In the case of hard drive-based camcorders, the video has to

be moved off the camcorder once the internal drive is full and onto a computer hard drive or disc.

Generally a camcorder with 60GB of storage will hold around 14 hours of Standard Definition (SD) video at its highest quality setting, and around seven hours of High Definition (HD) video.

While no solution is foolproof, some form of protection, such as backing up your video to an external hard drive or DV disc, will free up your camcorder and provide peace of mind in case anything goes wrong. While a lost Word document may lead to extra work in the office or a request for the file to be sent again, once you have lost your video it's often lost forever.

For more information on external backup drives and keeping data safe, check out *CHOICE Computer* January/February 2008. If you don't have a computer, another option is to record your footage onto a DV disc using a DVD recorder.

If you enjoy editing movies on your PC, why not share them online? That way you can ensure a copy of your work is kept safe in cyberspace while showing off your latest productions at the same time. Sites such as vimeo (www.vimeo.com) allow you a certain amount of space to upload a movie, while YouTube (www.youtube.com) is proving to be an extremely popular option for anyone wanting to share movies online either for everyone to see or just for a select few. >



FLIPPING OUT

The FLIP video ultra is not an HD camcorder, cannot capture video in widescreen (16:9) mode and does not have an optical zoom lens. It only has a 2GB internal memory with no expansion and cannot take still photos. It also scored worse than any of the models CHOICE tested. However, none of this has stopped it from becoming one of the most popular video cameras worldwide. Tiny, simple to use and with a USB plug integrated into the camera it's easy to download video to a PC and share movies on the internet via YouTube. And at only \$237 it is also the most affordable video camera in the test.



What to look for

CAMCORDER FEATURES

- An **optical image stabiliser** can help by adjusting internally for the camera movement – the lens elements move to counter any hand shake.
- **Video lamp/photo flash** These allow you to take video or photos in low light.
- **Still image primary memory type** SD removable memory or smaller variations of the format, including mini and microSD, have become the most popular type of removable memory, except for SONY camcorders where Memory Stick Pro Duo (MS Pro Duo) is used.
- **Dolby digital/surround sound** either separates the audio into a two-channel version of Dolby sound or the surround sound feature separates sound into five channels, providing a home-theatre effect to your production.
- **USB version** Most new camcorders have a much faster USB 2.0 standard which delivers similar performance to FireWire (a popular connection option for MiniDV camcorders) when transferring video from the camera to your computer.



- An **external microphone** usually provides better sound quality than a built-in one. So if good audio quality is important to you, make sure the camcorder allows you to connect one through the use of a **microphone input**.
- A **wide aspect (16:9) screen** shows your video as it would appear on a plasma or LCD TV.

HDMI High-definition multimedia interface is a new connection option available on most HD camcorders and delivers digital video and audio via a single cable – with no loss of quality – to a compatible TV or home-theatre system.

What to buy

Standard definition models

60% PANASONIC SDR-HZ80

PRICE \$1209
SYSTEM HDD

GOOD POINTS

- The PANASONIC delivered good video quality when using the optical image stabiliser and had the best audio among the SD models. It was also quick to start up and gave well over two hours of recording on a single charge.

BAD POINTS

- If you count a large optical zoom among your main requirements, you may find the 10X zoom a bit restrictive.



59% SONY DCR-SR220

PRICE \$1199
SYSTEM HDD

GOOD POINTS

- The SONY delivered good video quality when using the optical image stabiliser and exhibited mid-range audio among the SD models. It was easy to use and delivered well over two hours of recording on a single charge.

BAD POINTS

- The autofocus performance tended to suffer as the available light diminished.



High definition models

71% SONY HDR-SR11

PRICE \$1899
SYSTEM HDD

GOOD POINTS

- It's fast to start up and delivers very good image quality when using the optical image stabiliser. It performs well in low light and also has the largest screen of the models tested.

BAD POINTS

- It is slow to start up in still image mode and the wind filter is not very effective.



69% PANASONIC HDC-SD9

PRICE \$1649
SYSTEM Memory card

GOOD POINTS

- Good video quality when using the optical image stabiliser and easy to use. It is also quick to start up and gave two hours of recording on a single charge.

BAD POINTS

- The autofocus has trouble dealing with low-light situations.



68% PANASONIC HDC-HS9

PRICE \$1759
SYSTEM HDD

GOOD POINTS

- Delivers good video quality when using the optical image stabiliser and gives almost two hours' recording time.

BAD POINTS

- The autofocus has trouble dealing with low-light situations.



68% SONY HDR-HC9

PRICE \$1599
SYSTEM MiniDV

GOOD POINTS

- The SONY has good video quality when using the optical image stabiliser and also works well in low light conditions. It is also the best option if you want a combination of HD video and tape.



About the rest

- The PANASONIC NV-GS330 has been available for some time and continues to be a good choice for enthusiasts wanting to stay with tape but who still need a good level of quality. The CANON MD225 and SONY DCR-HC52 are more affordable miniDV tape camcorders and could be a good first-time option.
- The CANON HV30 is one of two HD tape-based models on test, however, the audio quality and battery life are poor.
- While the video picture quality of the SAMSUNG VP-HMX20C is an improvement over the previous model and its 8MP resolution for still photos is the highest of all the models tested, its audio and battery performance are relatively poor. It's also the only HD camcorder without an optical image stabiliser.
- The CANON HF10, HF100, HR10, and HG10 HD camcorders provide good to very good picture quality for still photos, while among the SD models the JVC GZ-MG730 delivers 5MP resolution for good quality still photos that will print up to A4 size.
- If you are looking for a DVD-based camcorder, the SONY DCR-DVD810 and PANASONIC VDR-D50 are the only SD camcorders we tested that use mini DVD discs, while the only HD quality camcorder that uses DVD media is the Canon HRI0.
- Holidaymakers and snorkellers may want to forgive the fairly poor scores achieved by the PANASONIC SDR-SW20 as it is the only camcorder on test that is waterproof to 1.5 metres and, according to the company, can take a drop from 1.2m.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE								FEATURES								
Brand/model (in rank order within groups)	Overall score (%)	Picture quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Versatility score (%)	Still photo score (%)	Battery score (%)	Recording time (minutes)	Remote control	External battery charger	Photo flash/video lamp	Still-image primary memory type	Still image resolution (megapixel)	Night shot (IR light)	Dolby digital/surround sound	HDMI	
	STANDARD DEFINITION																
	Panasonic SDR-H280	60	63	59	56	42	57	100	143	✓	✓	-/-	SDHC	0.8		✓/-	
	Sony DCR-SR220	59	59	61	47	55	48	100	147	✓		✓/-	MS Pro Duo	4.0	✓	✓/✓	
	Panasonic NV-GS330	53	56	56	47	43	62	37	77	✓	✓	-/-	SDHC	3.1		-/-	
	Canon FS10	50	44	59	46	38	45	100	163	✓		-/-	SDHC	1.0		✓/-	
	Sony DCR-DVD810	49	54	53	31	52	31	59	99	✓		-/-	MS Pro Duo	1.0	✓	✓/✓	
	Sony DCR-SR65	49	52	57	32	47	38	51	91	✓		-/-	MS Pro Duo	1.0	✓	✓/-	
	Sony DCR-SR85	49	52	57	32	48	38	56	96	✓		-/-	MS Pro Duo	1.0	✓	✓/✓	
	Sony DCR-SR45	45	43	55	36	39	28	61	101			-/-	MS Pro Duo	0.8	✓	✓/-	
	Panasonic SDR-H40	43	33	54	50	42	26	75	115		✓	-/-	SDHC	0.8		✓/-	
	Canon MD225	39	26	49	53	38	n/a	54	94			-/-	n/a	na		-/-	
	Panasonic SDR-SW20	38	36	48	42	29	32	24	64		✓	-/-	SDHC	0.8		-/-	
	Sony DCR-HC52	38	26	50	47	32	n/a	57	97			-/-	n/a	na	✓	-/-	
	JVC GZ-MG330H	37	22	53	40	36	36	75	115			-/-	microSD	0.8		✓/-	
	JVC GZ-MG730	36	28	49	27	35	60	42	82	✓		✓/-	microSD	5.0		✓/✓	
	Panasonic VDR-D50	36	22	47	51	46	30	38	78		✓	-/-	SDHC	0.8		✓/-	
Flip video ultra series	31	18	53	22	4	n/a	100	201			-/-	n/a	na		-/-		
HIGH DEFINITION																	
Sony HDR-SR11	71	87	60	51	77	60	59	99	✓		✓/-	MS Pro Duo	10.2	✓	✓/✓	✓	
Panasonic HDC-SD9	69	81	62	57	53	56	79	119	✓	✓	✓/-	SDHC	0.6		✓/✓	✓	
Panasonic HDC-HS9	68	81	60	57	61	56	72	112	✓	✓	✓/-	SDHC	0.6		✓/✓	✓	
Sony HDR-HC9	68	82	57	51	66	61	64	104	✓		✓/-	MS Pro Duo	6.1	✓	-/-	✓	
Sony HDR-SR10	67	75	61	58	65	57	65	105	✓		✓/-	MS Pro Duo	4.0	✓	✓/✓	✓	
Canon HF10	66	76	61	52	58	73	52	92	✓		✓/✓	SDHC	3.1		✓/✓	✓	
Canon HF100	65	76	61	52	56	72	49	89	✓		✓/✓	SDHC	3.1		✓/-	✓	
Canon HG10	65	77	56	42	68	70	73	113	✓		✓/✓	miniSD	3.1		✓/-	✓	
Canon HR10	65	79	50	62	52	69	61	101	✓		✓/✓	miniSD	3.1		✓/-	✓	
Samsung VP-HMX20C	61	73	54	42	54	67	55	95	✓		✓/-	SDHC	8.0		-/-	✓	
Sony HDR-TG1	60	71	59	47	43	44	62	102			✓/-	MS Pro Duo	4.0		✓/✓	✓	
Canon HV30	55	62	58	33	60	61	28	68	✓		✓/✓	miniSD	3.1		-/-	✓	
JVC GZ-HD5	54	61	50	49	48	39	55	95	✓		-/-	microSD	2.1		✓/-	✓	

HOW WE TESTED

Picture quality A viewing panel assessed the resolution, sharpness, colour and overall image quality of recordings in daylight and artificial light. They also assessed macro recordings, those made in low light and (where applicable) at night. The picture stabilisation function was looked at, as well as its effect on picture quality.

The standard-definition camcorders were judged against a good-quality SD consumer camcorder, while the high-definition camcorders were judged against a broadcast-quality camcorder. Therefore the SD and HD scores are not directly comparable.

Ease of use The panel looked at the instructions, the ease of using various functions, the quality and functionality of the viewfinder, LCD monitor and remote control, the portability of the camcorder and data transfer to a computer. They also measured the time delay between switching the recorder on and being able to use it.

Sound quality A panel assessed quality of speech and music recorded with the inbuilt and external microphone (if applicable). They also looked at whether there was any sensitivity to wind noise.

SPECIFICATIONS

Microphone input	Optical zoom range	LCD monitor, screen diagonal size (mm)	System	Aspect ratio	Optical image stabiliser	Weight (grams)	Dimensions (cm, W x H x D)	Contact	Price (\$)
	10	68	HDD 30GB / memory card	16 : 9	✓	480	8.5 x 7.5 x 14	panasonic.com.au	1209
✓ (B)	15	68	HDD 60GB / memory card	16 : 9	✓	550	9 x 8 x 13.5	sony.com.au	1199
	10	68	Mini-DV	16 : 9	✓	510	9 x 8 x 15	panasonic.com.au	989
✓	37	67	Memory card / flash 8 MB	16 : 9	✓	310	6.5 x 6 x 12.5	canon.com.au	699
✓ (B)	25	67	DVD-RW / +RW / -R (+R DL) / memory card	16 : 9	✓	440	7 x 9 x 13	sony.com.au	649
✓ (B)	25	67	HDD 40GB / memory card	16 : 9	✓	400	8.5 x 7.5 x 11.5	sony.com.au	899
✓ (C)	25	67	HDD 60GB / memory Card	16 : 9	✓	400	8.5 x 7.5 x 11.5	sony.com.au	929
	40	67	HDD 30GB / memory card	16 : 9	✓	390	8.5 x 7.5 x 11.5	sony.com.au	769
	42	68	HDD 40GB / memory card	16 : 9	✓	390	7.5 x 7.5 x 12	panasonic.com.au	769
✓ (B)	37	67	MiniDV	16 : 9	✓	440	7.5 x 8.5 x 13	canon.com.au	329
	10	68	Memory card	16 : 9	✓	240	3.5 x 6.5 x 11.5	panasonic.com.au	769
	40	62	MiniDV	4 : 3	✓	440	7 x 8.5 x 11.5	sony.com.au	349
	35	67	HDD 30GB / memory card	16 : 9	✓	360	6 x 7 x 12	jvc.com.au	769
	10	67	HDD 30GB / memory card	16 : 9	✓	380	7.5 x 7 x 12	jvc.com.au	1299
	42	68	DVD-RAM / -RW / -R (DL)	16 : 9	✓	460	7 x 9.5 x 14	panasonic.com.au	659
	1	37	flash 2GB	4 : 3	✓	150	5.5 x 11 x 3.5	edsoft.com.au	237
✓	12	81	HDD 60GB / memory card	16 : 9	✓	640	9.5 x 7.5 x 14	sony.com.au	1899
	10	68	Memory card	16 : 9	✓	330	7.5 x 6.5 x 12.5	panasonic.com.au	1649
	10	68	HDD 60GB / memory card	16 : 9	✓	440	8.5 x 7.5 x 12.5	panasonic.com.au	1759
✓	10	68	MiniDV	16 : 9	✓	650	9.5 x 8.5 x 14	sony.com.au	1599
✓ (B)	15	67	HDD 40GB / memory card	16 : 9	✓	550	9 x 7.5 x 13.5	sony.com.au	1399
✓	12	67	Memory card / flash 16MB	16 : 9	✓	430	8 x 6.5 x 13	canon.com.au	1499
✓	12	67	Memory card	16 : 9	✓	430	8 x 6.5 x 13	canon.com.au	1299
✓	10	68	HDD 40GB	16 : 9	✓	570	9 x 7.5 x 13	canon.com.au	1399
	10	68	DVD-RW -R (DL)	16 : 9	✓	600	8 x 9.5 x 13.5	canon.com.au	1099
✓	10	67	Memory card / flash 8MB	16 : 9	✓	500	8 x 7 x 14	samsung.com.au	1199
	10	67	Memory card (4GB delivered)	16 : 9	✓	300	3.5 x 12 x 6.5	sony.com.au	1399
✓	10	67	HDV / MiniDV	16 : 9	✓	610	10 x 8.5 x 14	canon.com.au	1349
✓	10	69	HDD 60GB / memory card	16 : 9	✓	580	9 x 7.5 x 14.5	jvc.com.au	1849

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Picture quality: 40%
- Ease of use: 25%
- Sound quality: 15%
- Versatility: 10%
- Still photo score: 5%
- Battery: 5%

Features See *What to look for*, page 46.
na Not applicable.

TABLE NOTES

(A) HDMI mini socket.

(B) Connection via accessory shoe attachment.

(C) Connection only possible using supplied docking station.

CAMCORDER SYSTEMS

Mini Digital Video (DV) A standard tape that can store 60-80 minutes of high-quality video.

Hard-disc (HDD) This camcorder type enables you to drag and drop a video file to a computer for editing.

Memory (flash) card A removable memory card or flash memory allows you to store up to 32GB of video and photos on a card no larger than a postage stamp.

DVD models use an 8cm DVD-RAM, DVD-RW/DVD+RW or DVD-R/DVD+R to record video and photos.

Still photo For the still-photo score, the panel assessed the quality of photos taken in daylight, the shutter delay and the transfer speed of still pictures via FireWire and/or USB.

Versatility Each camera was assessed against a list of nearly 50 features.

Battery The tester measured how long the batteries lasted using a recording and playback test cycle. The camcorder was positioned on a slowly rotating turntable recording a well-lit room with items at different distances until the camera stopped. During this time the camcorders were switched to full auto recording mode with the monitor, autofocus and image stabiliser switched on.



Barbecues for the balcony

You don't need a big backyard – we put eight small barbecues to the test, and investigate whether gas or electricity is best.

nutshell

- ▶ All models are meant to suit smaller spaces but some are designed much better than others.
- ▶ Watch your fingers – many models on test have hoods that can become extremely hot.

Once a nation of quarter-acre blocks, Australia is rapidly becoming a country of townhouse and apartment living, especially in our bigger cities. But while many of us may no longer be living the big house and backyard dream, there's no reason you can't have a barbecue.

Two-burner barbecues are becoming increasingly popular and offer all the features of larger four-burner BBQs, such as a hood, chargrill plate and solid hotplate and can accommodate cooking for about four to six at once. Designed for smaller spaces, such as courtyards or balconies, many models have side tables that fold down to create extra space when not in use.

CHOICE tested eight small barbecues priced from \$199 to \$999. While most of the models had two burners, we also tested two models with just one burner, and an electric barbecue. Overall, most of them performed well. They are versatile enough to combine the functions of a grill, BBQ and griddle pan in one appliance.

Is electric the way to go?

No gas bottles to refill, no coals and less mess. Is an electric barbecue the way of the future? We tested the SUNBEAM Kettle King electric model to see how it stood up against its more traditional cousins. Our testers were far from overwhelmed by its performance. It was the worst performer in our test overall, and because it performs so differently from the other models we separated it in the table.

Although it is easy to assemble and produces less smoke when cooking than the other models, the cons outweigh the pros. It needs access to power, yet the cord is short so you would need an outside powerpoint or a good extension cord. It was one of the lowest rating models for ease of use; our testers found the stand top heavy, food can easily slide off the hotplate when being manipulated, it has a small cooking area and small labelling on the controls.

You'll also need to watch your fingers, as the BBQ plate is completely exposed when the hood is off and the hood can be dangerously hot. Most importantly, the food didn't cook well either. Our testers gave it a poor result for cooking steak and described the other food as more "stewed" than barbecued. >

What to buy

WEBER Q200	\$519
BEEFEATER Discovery Classic Two Burner	\$699
DOWNUNDER Two Burner G2HDPC	\$349

BEST BUY

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE			FEATURES				
Brand/model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Cooking performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Ignition type	Warming rack	Cupboard in trolley	Side burner	Hotplates supplied
GAS BBQ								
Weber Q200	82	90	70	Piezo manual button				Chargrill plate
Beefeater Discovery Classic Two Burner	81	85	76	Piezo on left side burner gas tap	✓		✓	Chargrill plate/Solid hotplate
Downunder Two Burner G2HDPC	81	83	78	Piezo on right side burner gas tap		✓		Chargrill plate/Solid hotplate
Gasmate CB2-002-D	77	81	72	Battery operated on both burners	✓	✓		Chargrill plate/Solid hotplate
Jackaroo Dockside Duo	76	78	72	Piezo manual button	✓			Chargrill plate/Solid hotplate
Weber 57cm One-Touch Kettle with Gas Kit	72	76	66	Manual				Grill rack
Grandhall Neil Perry T-Grill	70	76	60	Battery operated on both burners	✓	✓		Chargrill plate
ELECTRIC BBQ								
Sunbeam Kettle King HG6600B	62	61	63	NA			No	Non-stick hot plate

What to look for

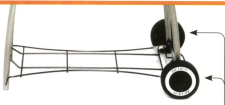
BBQ ESSENTIALS

- Look for a **half grill and half hotplate**.
- Make sure it's **easy to access** all the cooking area as some hoods can restrict access due to their warming racks.
- A **good hood** will open enough so it doesn't blow smoke in your face and should also have reasonable resistance against accidental closing from gusts of wind. Double skin hoods reduce the external temperature.
- Look for **clearly labelled controls** with positive stops at both the high and low position. Check to see that they are easy to grip and turn. Knobs that slant out from the fascia are easier to see, ensuring you don't have to bend over.
- Piezo ignition** which is activated by turning the controls.
- The **drip tray** should be easy to remove and replace. It should also be self-centring so that it catches all the fat.
- Handles** should have enough space so you don't burn your hands on the hot panel behind.

If you have **limited space** consider a model with side tables that fold down to free up space and make life easier if you need to move your barbecue often.



If you need to **move the trolley**, even only occasionally, it will be a lot easier if it has four castors.



If the trolley only has two wheels, check it is **not too heavy** to lift the other end for moving and that there are no sharp edges where you grip it.

TROLLEY ESSENTIALS

- There are many different types of trolleys so look for the features that suit your specific needs, such as **cupboards** or a **side burner**.
- Wooden trolleys** require regular tightening of the bolts.
- Stainless steel** trolleys require extra attention when cleaning due to smudges and fingerprints. Some may also rust in certain environments.
- The **height** of trolleys can vary a lot, so choose one that works for you.
- Large side trays** are useful for holding food and utensils but be careful not to place plastic items too close to the BBQ as they could melt.
- Some trolleys can be difficult and time-consuming to **assemble** so a pre-assembled or more basic model may suit you better. If you're not handy consider paying extra for the retailer to assemble it instead.



For more on what to look for in a barbecue go to www.choice.com.au/bbq.

The small barbecues **CHOICE** tested are versatile enough to combine the functions of a grill, BBQ and griddle pan in one appliance.

SPECIFICATIONS

Gas consumption (kg/hr)	Dimensions (cm, W x D x H)* (Hotplate height)	Contacts	Price (\$)
0.32	83 x 51 x 99.5 (84)	weberbbq.com.au	519
0.67	118.5 x 65 x 115.5 (87)	beefeaterbbq.com	699
0.53	77.1 x 64.5 x 78 (91)	barbequesgalore.com.au	349
0.67	66.1 x 63.5 x 120 (92)	gasmate.com.au	599
0.69	87 x 51.5 x 109 (87.5)	jackaroo.com.au	199
0.23	60 x 71 x 96 (69)	weberbbq.com.au	399
0.67	117 x 71 x 117 (96.5)	grandhall.com.au	999
na	65.5 x 55 x 110 (88)	sunbeam.com.au	280

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Cooking performance: 60%
- Ease of use: 40%

Price Recommended retail, including trolley, as of September 2008.

TABLE NOTES

* Dimensions are with hood and side trays closed, including knobs, wheels, handles.

HOW WE TESTED

Cooking Our CHOICE home economists cooked marinated chicken wings and a whole chicken with the hood closed. The chicken was placed on a rack and positioned where there is no direct heat under it and turned only once during cooking. They also cooked sausages and steak with the hood open (unless stated by the manufacturer to cook with it closed), covering the entire surface to check how evenly it's heated. If it's even, you can fill the plate without worrying about some sausages burning while others remain undercooked. Because of this, the cooking performance of lower-scoring models may be improved if the cooking is monitored and the food moved around between hotter and cooler parts to improve the evenness.

Ease of Use Our testers assessed how easy each barbecue is to cook on, clean, move and fit a gas bottle (except the SUNBEAM), as well as the ease of using the controls.

Profiles

82% WEBER Q200

PRICE \$559

GOOD POINTS

- Best for cooking performance.
- Excellent result for roasting a chicken and cooking marinated chicken wings.
- Very good result for cooking sausages and steak.
- Gas bottle is easy to fit, no lifting required.
- Portable.

BAD POINTS

- You need your own tools to assemble it.
- No hotplate provided, only a chargrill plate, but hotplate can be purchased separately.
- No thermometer in hood.
- Folding side tables can tilt when heavy items placed on them.
- No warming rack.
- The hood becomes dangerously hot.
- No side panels to protect food and burner from drafts.
- The BBQ isn't completely secure when it sits on the trolley.
- The manual Piezo button requires pressure to press.
- Need to stoop when lighting.



81% DOWNUNDER Two Burner G2HDPC

PRICE \$349

GOOD POINTS

- Best for ease of use.
- Excellent result for cooking steaks.
- Very good result for cooking sausages and roasting a whole chicken.
- Easy to assemble.
- Hood thermometer is fairly accurate.
- Very easy to move.
- Very good controls.
- Easy to clean.

BAD POINTS

- The front panel becomes dangerously hot with hood open.
- No side panels to protect food and burners from drafts.
- Hood can become dangerously hot.



BEST BUY

81% BEEFEATER Discovery Classic Two Burner

PRICE \$699

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent result for roasting a chicken and cooking chicken wings.
- Grill plate lifter tool.
- Viewing glass in hood.
- Very good controls.
- Very easy to move.
- Hood thermometer is fairly accurate.
- A good cookbook comes with the barbecue.

BAD POINTS

- You need your own tools to assemble it.
- Failed stability test.
- Side tables and control panel are stainless steel which requires extra effort to keep clean.
- The food warmer needs to be removed for good access to food.
- No handles on the side table, uncomfortable to grip and the sides don't fold down.
- Hood becomes dangerously hot.



About the rest

- While the GASMATE rated very well for both its cooking performance and controls, our testers found the thermometer wasn't very accurate.
- The JACKEROO was the cheapest model on test and scored excellently for cooking chicken wings and roasting chicken. However, it got a poor rating for steak and the thermometer wasn't accurate.
- The WEBER One-Touch Kettle received a poor score for cooking steak and doesn't have a thermometer. Being a kettle model, the lid needs to be kept on for cooking.
- The GRANDHALL was the most expensive model on test and is endorsed by chef Neil Perry. While it looks great, it's an average performer. It has an extremely heavy hood which is difficult to lift, the side shelves don't fold down and mobility is poor, which is a liability in a small space. It scored very well for roasting chicken and cooking steak but there is no thermometer in the hood.

SMART BBQ CORDLESS POWER GRILL BRUSH

Price \$20 to \$40

Contact Mitre 10 and online stores.

CHOICE tested this brush on a barbecue hotplate and grill which were grimy with greasy residue and some rust. The handle and controls are comfortable and easy to use, but the brush is heavy as it takes eight AA batteries (not included). It's good at removing grime and rust from a flat hotplate, but it's difficult to get the brush head into corners and the rotating brush slows against raised edges.

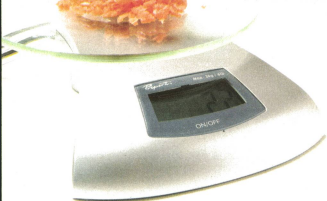
The brush is less effective on a grill plate as it only cleans the tops of the bars. Pressing it down to get at the sides causes it to slow or stop. The built-in scraper was also ineffective at lifting stubborn build-up.

The brush comes with a spare head for which you need a flathead screwdriver, but you also need a crosshead screwdriver to open the battery compartment.

CHOICE VERDICT

Compared with a typical three-in-one barbecue brush [wire brush, scouring pad and metal scraper], which we bought for \$15, the three-in-one is cheaper, easier to use and more effective than the powered brush.





Weigh it up

We put electronic and mechanical kitchen scales to the test.

nutshell

► Price is no indicator of quality – one of the most expensive models on test rated poorly.
► Electronic or mechanical – which is best for you?

If you like to cook from a recipe, a good set of kitchen scales is necessary. Rather than trying to convert grams to cups, or hazard a guess at the amount or weight of ingredients needed, a kitchen scale will make your cooking experience easier by providing an accurate measure.

If you're looking to buy a set of kitchen scales, you will need to consider what types of food you like to cook before deciding which model to buy. If you make bread or other dishes that require small amounts of some ingredients, then a digital scale is the way to go. They allow you to measure small amounts precisely and accurately, usually providing a tare function to allow for continuous weighing.

Digital scales are also more practical if you are on a diet where your calorie intake needs to be strictly monitored and relies on precise measurements of

ingredients and meals. On the other hand, mechanical scales can be useful if you are just measuring larger amounts of ingredients and don't need to measure out small, precise amounts.

CHOICE tested nine electronic scales, priced from \$80 to \$160. We also tested six mechanical scales, which we haven't recommended as they don't perform to the same standard as electronic scales, although they might suit you. See *Step back in time: Mechanical scales*, page 55.

Continuous weighing

When cooking with multiple ingredients it can be annoying, and messy, to empty ingredients into a separate container after you weigh it. The good news is you don't have to do this if you have a tare function on your kitchen scales. Tare is also known as continuous weighing, which allows you to repeatedly reset the weight to zero each time you add an ingredient to the bowl or change containers. While it's a handy feature, it's important to note that this only works to the maximum weight capacity of the scales you are using. For example, if you have a five kilogram scale you can't tare at four kilos and then weigh out another two kilos. >

What to buy \$

TUPPERWARE Bake 2 Basics	\$93
SALTER 1004SSDR	\$160
TARGET Modern Living EK8250	\$40

BEST BUY

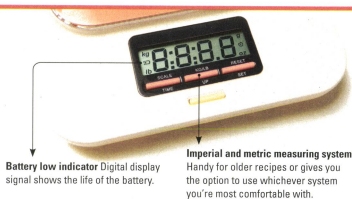
What to look for

KITCHEN SCALES ESSENTIALS

- **Capacity** The maximum weight the scales can hold for the domestic kitchen; 3-5kg is sufficient. Bear in mind that the maximum weighing capacity of the scales includes the total weight of the ingredients and the weight of the bowl/try.
- **Weighing platform** You want a large enough platform area to hold most of your ingredients, but it is OK if some of it hangs over the side as long as it is balanced and centred on the platform and you can still see the readout – the KENWOOD DS700 had this problem.
- **Tare** is used to reset the scale to zero and allows for continuous weighing, as explained above.
- **Non-slip base** This is more important for mechanical scales where the base is used to reset the scales to zero.
- **Storage** Mechanical scales can be bulky, however the SALTER and TERRAILLON mechanical scales have an appealing, old-fashioned look that would sit nicely on a benchtop in the right style kitchen. Electronic scales are compact and can be stored easily.

A SALES GIMMICK, PERHAPS?

- **Liquid measure feature** Liquids can be weighed on any scale using a kilogram readout providing the liquid is of similar density to water. Weighing less or more viscous (dense) liquids will be inaccurate, unless the recipe lists a liquid amount in grams rather than millilitres.



Battery low indicator Digital display signal shows the life of the battery.

Imperial and metric measuring system Handy for older recipes or gives you the option to use whichever system you're most comfortable with.

ELECTRONIC SCALES

- **Screen** Easy to read digital display with clear labelling.
- **Automatic turn off screen** Turns the screen off, saving the battery when not in use. If you do lots of batch weighing, choose a model that has a longer time period before it switches off.

MECHANICAL SCALES

- **Increments** The numbering should be clear with a contrasting colour needle.
- **Easy to zero** either by base rotation or dialling.

Profiles

The scales on their *What to buy* list are electronic. If you prefer mechanical scales see the table on the next page.



89% TUPPERWARE Bake 2 Basics

PRICE \$93

MAXIMUM CAPACITY 3kg

GOOD POINTS

- Best performer overall.
- Excellent result for performance and very good ease of use.
- Automatic turn-off screen.
- Non-slip base.

BAD POINTS

- No battery low indicator.
- No weighing bowl.



88% SALTER 1004SSDR

PRICE \$160

MAXIMUM CAPACITY 5kg

GOOD POINTS

- Very good performance overall.
- Equal best in performance.
- Battery low indicator.
- Non-slip base.
- Good sized weighing platform.
- Automatic turn-off screen.
- Very good ease of use.

BAD POINTS

- No weighing bowl.
- Most expensive model tested.



86% TARGET Modern Living EK8250

PRICE \$40

MAXIMUM CAPACITY 5kg

GOOD POINTS

- Scored very well overall.
- Excellent results in performance and very good ease of use.
- Automatic turn-off screen.
- Battery low indicator.
- Non-slip base.
- Has a timer and room temperature readout.

BAD POINTS

- No weighing bowl.

ELECTRONIC SCALES*

Brand/model (in rank order)	Overall score	Ease of use score	Performance score	Maximum capacity (kg)	Metric/imperial	Battery low indicator	Time before auto power off (min)	Weighing platform	Contact	Price (\$)
Tupperware Bake 2 Basics	89	87	91	3	Both	✓	3	Plastic	tupperware.com.au	93
Salter 1004SSDR	88	83	96	5	Both	✓	1	Stainless steel	salter.com.au	160
Target Modern Living EK8250	86	83	91	5	Both	✓	2	Stainless steel	target.com.au	40
Breville Ikon BSK500	83	83	83	5	Both	✓	2	Stainless steel	breville.com.au	100
Salter 1020BKSSDR	83	77	91	5	Both	✓	1	Stainless steel	salter.com.au	80
Terraillon T898W & Jug	82	73	96	5	Metric	✓	1	Plastic (A)	albi.com.au	65
Proport Glass Top Digital 1350	79	70	92	3	Both	✓	3	Glass	proport.com.au	40
Kenwood Animation DS700	74	70	79	3	Both	✓	3	Glass	kenwood-australia.com.au	80
Terraillon Book	69	77	58	5	Both	✓	2	Plastic	albi.com.au	139

USING THE TABLES

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Ease of use: 60%
- Performance: 40% (accuracy 60%, continuous weighing 40%)

TABLE NOTES

All electronic scales tested have 1g increments.

(A) Platform and jug/bowl.

(B) Discontinued, but may be in some stores.

About the rest

ELECTRONIC SCALES

- Despite having a neat design, the TERRAILLON Book was the worst performer overall for electronic scales. It was also one of the most expensive models at \$139, despite not having a mixing bowl and scored the lowest for performance.
- The KENWOOD, TERRAILLON Jug, PROPERT and SALTER all scored lower for ease of use than the top three models.
- If you prefer a weighing bowl, the TERRAILLON Jug is the only electronic scale that has one, however it provides metric measurements only.

MECHANICAL SCALES

- The KENWOOD Cuisine, while being capable of continuous weighing, is difficult to reset to zero. The TARGET Modern Living mechanical model is difficult to reset when it is empty as it tends to slide about on the benchtop.
- The PROPERT has a microwave-safe weighing bowl which can be handy.
- The SALTER mechanical and the TERRAILLON mechanical don't have a continuous weighing function, and the SALTER was one of the most expensive models on test.

STEP BACK IN TIME: MECHANICAL SCALES

Shiny, curved and retro cool, mechanical scales are making a comeback in many stylish kitchens. While some of these models can look fabulous and are designed to be on display in your kitchen they don't perform to the same standard as electronic models.

Overall, the mechanical scales rated from "good" to "borderline".

Both the SALTER and the TERRAILLON are separated from the other mechanical scales as they do not have a continuous weighing feature and can't be compared with the other mechanical scales. The supermodels of the scales on test, these two look great and if you're prepared to do without the continuous weighing function, they scored quite well overall.

For the mechanical scales that do have a continuous weighing function, TARGET and SALTER were the best performers overall with 66%, while the KENWOOD scored lowest with a borderline result.



Be wary of any scales claiming to be able to weigh both solids and fluids – you'll get an inaccurate reading for fluids that are much heavier or lighter than water.

HOW WE TESTED

Accuracy Our CHOICE home economist conducted a series of tests over the permitted range for both the mechanical and electronic scales. A scale's accuracy is measured by how close its measurement is to the true weight of the item. She also checked how consistent the performance was over a number of repeat measurements.

Continuous weighing of each model was also tested by using the tare function where it was available.

Ease of use Our tester assessed the labelling or the ease of reading the measurements, using the controls, the continuous weighing function, if it was available, and ease of cleaning.

MECHANICAL SCALES

Brand/model (in rank order)	Overall score	Ease of use score	Performance score	Maximum capacity (kg)	Graduation/increments (g)	Metric &/or Imperial	Weighing platform	Weighing bowl (size & material)	Contact	Price (\$)
CONTINUOUS WEIGHING										
Salter Aqua-weigh 800	66	63	71	4	25	Both	Plastic	Large, plastic	salter.com.au	60
Target Modern Living KCI-SSP	66	50	91	3	25	Both	Plastic	Medium, plastic	target.com.au	17
Properit with Microwave Bowl 930	64	63	66	3	25	Both	Plastic	Large, plastic	properit.com.au	20
Kenwood Cuisine DS403	50	63	31	3	25	Both	Plastic	Large, plastic	kenwood-australia.com.au	30
NON-CONTINUOUS WEIGHING										
Salter 094	75	60	97	5	25	Both	Metal	Medium, stainless steel	salter.com.au	150
Terrailon Tradition 500 (B)	71	57	93	5	10	Metric	Metal	Medium, stainless steel	albi.com.au	70



Charged and ready

Just in time for 'new toys', we put 10 NiMH rechargeable AA batteries to the test.

nutshell

▶ A good rechargeable battery can replace hundreds of regular batteries, which is good for the environment.
▶ Several pre-charged ("ready to use") batteries were among the best performers.

The holiday season is a great time for taking lots of photos with your new digital camera, playing with new electronic gadgets and toys ... and needing new batteries to run them all. Rechargeable batteries are the most economical and environmentally friendly batteries for high-drain, frequently used gadgets, but until now you've had to spend several hours charging them before their first use – and who wants to wait that long before using their new toy?

Fortunately, several manufacturers have recently released pre-charged or "ready to use" rechargeable batteries, which can be used straight out of the pack. These currently have lower capacities than many other rechargeable batteries – they're 2000mAh to 2100mAh rather than 2500mAh to 2700mAh.

We put 10 rechargeable AA batteries to the test to see which ones last longest, can be recharged the most often, and don't lose their charge when left unused. We included five ready to use batteries and, interestingly, the three recommended models are all ready to use. These three have excellent consistency and low rates of self discharge – important given the batteries might sit in a warehouse or shop for several weeks before you buy and use them. The other two ready to use models were also reasonably good performers.

Rechargeable v non-rechargeable

Rechargeable These are best suited to digital cameras and other frequently used devices that drain batteries rapidly. They're more expensive than regular batteries, especially when you factor in buying a charger, but in the long run they're actually much cheaper – a good rechargeable battery can replace hundreds of regular batteries. That's good for the environment too as it means fewer dead batteries going to landfill.

Many rechargeable AA batteries now have high capacities and can last a long time in use. Most are NiMH (nickel-metal hydride). This technology allows for higher capacity than the older NiCd (nickel-cadmium) rechargeable batteries, and is less dangerous to the environment.

Of course, you'll need to recharge occasionally, so you may want to have some spare charged batteries on hand so you can keep using the device. Make sure

What to buy \$



VARTA Ready2Use Mignon	BEST BUY	\$19.95
UNIROSS Hybrid Ready To Use Rechargeable Battery		\$22.95
SANYO Eneloop Ready To Use		\$22.99

Prices are recommended retail for a pack of four batteries.

you use a charger designed for that type of battery; preferably, use a charger with trickle-feed or heat protection so it won't overcharge. Overcharging can damage or even destroy a battery.

Self-discharge is a problem for most rechargeable batteries, so they are not well suited for infrequently used or low-drain devices, such as an emergency torch or a smoke alarm, as the battery will go flat over time faster than non-rechargeable batteries.

Non-rechargeable Previous CHOICE tests have shown that lithium batteries, such as the ENERGIZER e² Lithium, are the best performers among non-rechargeables for high-drain devices. They generally have a long shelf life as well. When a rechargeable battery is not an option, such as when you're travelling and don't have a chance to recharge, lithium batteries are a good alternative. They're also excellent for use in smoke alarms due to their long life and low self-discharge. Standard alkaline batteries are cheaper than lithium, and can be used in most everyday devices like radios and toys. However, a good rechargeable battery can replace an alkaline in most cases. For infrequently used devices, such as an emergency torch, cheap zinc-carbon batteries are fine. ■

About the rest

The remaining batteries were not as good as the recommended models for various reasons.

- The CAMELION Always Ready has a comparatively high rate of self-discharge, and is the most expensive on test.
- The DURACELL Rechargeable 2650mAh failed to complete 200 cycles of testing – it failed after 133 cycles.
- The UNIROSS Rechargeable 2700mAh only managed 98 cycles of testing, and is one of the more expensive batteries on test.
- The KODAK Pre-Charged Digital Camera Battery failed after 193 cycles.
- The EVEREADY Rechargeable has only OK performance overall.
- The ENERGIZER Rechargeable 2500 failed after 121 cycles.
- The KODAK Digital Camera Battery does not retain its capacity well over several recharges, failed after 124 cycles and has a high rate of self-discharge.

HOW WE TESTED

The batteries were put through 200 continuous cycles of charge and discharge to measure their endurance and capacity consistency. They were also tested for self-discharge.

Endurance Batteries with good endurance can power an appliance for longer and be recharged more often. Batteries were penalised if they didn't complete the full 200 cycles of testing, although some had good endurance up to the time of failure.

Consistency This is measured by how well the battery retains its initial capacity – that is, a battery rated for 2500mAh should still have close to that capacity after 200 recharges. A low score means the battery loses a lot of capacity over multiple recharges.

Self-discharge Rechargeable batteries tend to lose some charge when left unused, but a good battery will lose only a little. The higher the score, the lower the self-discharge.

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score is made up of:

- Endurance: 60%
- Consistency: 30%
- Self-discharge: 10%

See *How we tested*, above, for an explanation of these results. The scores are comparative within this test; they cannot be directly compared with previous tests.

Failure cycle The charge/discharge cycle at which the battery failed.

"None" indicates the battery achieved 200 cycles (and might have kept going for many more).

Price Based on recommended retail for a pack of four, September 2008.

No one likes waiting several hours to charge new batteries – fortunately the three products in our *What to buy* list are ready to use.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE					SPECIFICATIONS			
Brand/model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Endurance score (%)	Consistency score (%)	Self-discharge score (%)	Failure cycle	Product code	Claimed maximum capacity, mAh	Ready to Use	Price per battery (\$)
Varta Ready2Use Mignon	84	79	97	73	None	HR6-56706	2100	✓	4.99
Uniross Hybrio Ready to Use	83	76	97	81	None	U0119870	2100	✓	5.74
Sanyo Eneloop Ready to Use Rechargeable Battery	83	74	100	87	None	HR3UTG4BP	2000	✓	5.75
Camelion Always Ready	79	74	95	57	None	NHAA2100ARBPA	2100	✓	9.33
Duracell Rechargeable 2650mAh	77	77	76	75	133	75019759	2650		5.50
Uniross Rechargeable 2700mAh	72	69	77	71	98	U0100427	2700		6.24
Kodak Pre-Charged Digital Camera Battery	68	68	64	75	193	KAARPC-4	2100	✓	4.99
Eveready Rechargeable	65	66	64	65	None	RE15BP2	2000		4.82
Energizer Rechargeable 2500	64	69	52	68	121	NH15BP4	2500		5.75
Kodak Digital Camera Battery	52	65	41	10	124	KAARDC-2	2500		4.24



Getting the oven sparkling clean

We tested 12 oven cleaners to uncover the most effective for the dreaded job of cleaning the oven.

nutshell

► Caustic oven cleaners cut the grease, but two of the non-caustic products also impressed our testers.

► For a cheap "green" alternative oven cleaner, try bicarb and vinegar – the commercial green cleaners we tested aren't worth the money.

If you don't wipe your oven regularly after each use, then it's all down to elbow grease or a specially formulated oven cleaner. To see which brands are best at delivering a squeaky clean oven without back-breaking hard work, we tested all the products we could find in major supermarkets and put them through tough tests. We also looked at their ingredients in the hope of finding one that will do the hard work without damaging your health or the environment.

Handle with care

At least seven of the 12 products in our test are caustic: they contain sodium hydroxide (NaOH), often called caustic soda, which reacts with fats, converting them into water-soluble soapy compounds you can wipe away. But it's highly corrosive, even in dilute forms, so if you get it on your skin or in your eyes, you can suffer severe irritation, deep burns or even blindness. "Alkaline salts", listed on two product labels, is a vague term – caustic soda is an alkaline salt, but there are others.

Other ingredients aren't without hazards either. Some diethyl glycol alkyl ethers (DGAE) in oven cleaners have been shown to have destructive effects on blood cells. And the solvent ethanolamine, although non-caustic, can affect the respiratory and central nervous systems, even after short-term exposure.

To minimise these health hazards, take care when using a commercial oven cleaner. Have the kitchen well ventilated when applying the product and avoid inhaling any fumes – follow the instructions and wear a face mask and safety glasses, if necessary. To prevent your skin coming in contact with the product, wear long-sleeved protective clothing and gloves. After the product has been applied for the recommended time, remove the residue with paper towel. Then wipe the oven with a neutralising solution of 10% vinegar.

The environment, too, can suffer from thoughtless disposal of oven cleaner. So use the whole contents and put the empty can in with your steel can recycling, if they're accepted in your area. Dispose of leftover product in your council's household chemical collection, or if it's just a small amount, spray it into sawdust or paper towels before putting it in the rubbish.

Less hazardous alternatives

We included in the test two cleaners that don't contain sodium hydroxide, ethanolamine or alkaline salts. Unfortunately, their cleaning power left much to be desired. The RUBBEDIN gel, with 1% d-limonene (a solvent derived from citrus rind) hardly got rid of any stains; wiping with a sponge after 30 minutes just seemed to remove the product. It was difficult

FIT TO DRINK?

What were the manufacturers thinking when they packaged this cleaner? The CINDERELLA Super Fast Oven & BBQ Cleaner is orange in colour, labelled "passionfruit" and comes in a clear PET container that looks like a soft-drink bottle, except for the trigger on top. According to the manufacturer, this cleaner is designed to be safe around children: "When formulating we worked to the premise that in a worst-case scenario [if] a child ingested the product no harm would occur." Even if the cleaner contains no hazardous ingredients CHOICE thinks this design is irresponsible. A cleaner is a cleaner and should never entice a young child to take a sip.

Fortunately, CINDERELLA has told us it's working on the packaging to better reflect the nature of the product. The new packaging should be released in Jan/Feb 2009. In our test, CINDERELLA Super Fast Oven & BBQ Cleaner did not score well.



What to buy \$



COLES Reliance Oven Cleaner Non-Caustic (300g)*	\$2.30
SELLEYS Oven Plus Heavy Duty Gel (400g)	\$5.00
EASY-OFF Oven Fume Free Cleaner (325g)	\$3.00
EASY-OFF Oven Heavy Duty Cleaner 5 Minute Clean (325g)	\$3.00
BLACK & GOLD Caustic Oven Cleaner (400g)	\$2.20
MR MUSCLE Heavy Duty Oven Cleaner (300g)	\$3.00
AMWAY Blast Off Oven Cleaner (400g)	\$10.50

*Will be renamed Coles Smart-Buy.

and messy to apply and didn't stick well to the surface. Worse still was the CINDERELLA oven and barbecue cleaner. "Most of what was removed was by scourer pad action, not the oven cleaner," our testers remarked – see *Fit to drink?*, below left.

As these milder cleaners don't cut through baked-on grease, you might as well save your money and use a natural alternative – bicarb and vinegar, which we also included in the test. Bicarbonate of soda is mildly abrasive and is known to remove stains, while white vinegar cuts grease and disinfects. It's fiddlier to apply and requires more effort to wipe clean, but for cleaning performance it beat the \$6 CINDERELLA product.

To use bicarb and vinegar effectively, Shannon Lush and Jennifer Fleming, in their book *Spotless*, advise sprinkling bicarb on the cool oven surface, splashing some vinegar on top and when it starts fizzing, scrub with a nylon sponge or brush. To clean the sides of the oven, use two damp sponges, one dipped in bicarb and another in

vinegar and press the vinegar through both. If cleaning the cheap, green wall doesn't work for you and the traditional products seem too hazardous, then wipe your oven after each use.

All the oven cleaners in the *What to buy* list scored above 70% both overall and for cleaning performance. They all removed many of the stains with a sponge, only needing a little scrub with a scourer to remove the last burnt-on traces. Go to www.choice.com.au for the table and full results.

Non-caustic If you're looking for a cleaner with no sodium hydroxide, COLES Reliance Non-Caustic and EASY-OFF Fume Free oven cleaners are your best choices, but you'll have to leave them on your oven for two hours.

Heavy duty If you want to get the job over and done with quickly, the heavy duty cleaners from EASY-OFF and MR MUSCLE are the best of the fast-working products – just give them five minutes before you clean off the mess. ■

Milder cleaners don't cut through baked-on grease, so save your money and use a natural alternative instead, such as bicarb and vinegar.

HOW WE TESTED

Cleaning performance Our testers applied a special food mixture (measured quantities of milk, sugar, cherry and tomato juice, vegetable oil, dripping, flour and raw egg) evenly to enamelled test panels and baked them for 90 minutes at 250°C. When the panels cooled, they brushed on a second coat of food mixture and baked them again, and once more the next day without applying more food mixture.

They then applied the oven cleaner, testing each product several times as recommended by the manufacturers. They wiped the panels with a damp

sponge and a scourer pad – the cleaner the panel and the less effort required, the higher the score.

Ease of use The testers applied each product to the inside of the oven and rated it for its ease of application, coverage and adherence to the back, top, side and bottom surfaces. They also checked the instructions and noted any offensive odours and wafting mists during use.

Safety They checked whether the product labels provide sufficient safety information and whether any were particularly noxious during use.



Tapping into filters

To make drinking water safe it has additives. So what can you do if your tap water smells or tastes strange?

nutshell

- ▶ Following a simple checklist can help you avoid spending your cash on something you may not need.
- ▶ If you do decide on a filter, choose one based on what you want to filter out.

If you've ever wondered about the quality of the water coming out of your taps, you can be confident it's been thoroughly tested before it reaches your house. In fact, your water supplier's website should carry regular reports on its water quality. However, safe drinking water requires additives you can often smell or taste, such as chlorine, a disinfectant widely used by Australian water suppliers.

Filtering the water at the tap is one way of removing the taste of additives. But first you must decide what you want to filter out, what filtering device to use and how much the different options cost. And you need to be confident the one you choose actually does the job.

What is that colour/taste?

The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines specify that water "should contain no harmful concentrations of chemicals or pathogenic micro-organisms, and ideally it should be aesthetically pleasing in regard to appearance, taste and odour." Water authorities use settling, coagulation, filtering and disinfecting to ensure the safety of our drinking water, using sufficient disinfectant to stop the regrowth of micro-organisms as the water travels through the pipe system to your home. The downside of ensuring our water is safe to drink is the lingering taste and smell of disinfectant. If you fill up a jug with tap water and leave it to sit for a couple of hours, the disinfectant smell and taste will gradually dissipate.

WHY NO TEST?

CHOICE decided to prepare this research report rather than laboratory test water filters for reasons including cost, time and relevance. It would also have been very difficult to pick a representative range of models and water supplies across Australia.

When you turn on your tap, you should see clear, non-cloudy water. If not, or it tastes strange, then there are ways to find out why. See *How well is your water*, page 62, for details.

Beyond the tap

The basic pros and cons of each type of filtering system are listed, right, as well as an estimate of initial costs. Ongoing costs can be determined by checking the volume or time it claims to filter before requiring replacement. Be sure to factor in the cost of replacement filter cartridges and always replace them as instructed, as spent cartridges can themselves harbour micro-organisms. What each cartridge can filter varies even within the different types of dispensers.

You can also buy shower filters and ones built into a refrigerator's ice and water dispenser. These are generally carbon filters. There is also a whole-house option, but these are expensive and generally only justified in specific situations, such as if your water supply is of poor quality.

WORTH BOTTLING?

Bottled water has its pros and cons, as we reported in CHOICE July 2005 (www.choice.com.au). However, in the past year the debate has shifted, with negative light shining on the lifecycle of a bottle of water. Think about how much energy is required to obtain the water from the source, then produce, transport, refrigerate and finally recycle the bottles, even though only 35% actually get recycled – most end up in landfill. Some local councils recently decided to discourage the use of bottled water. As the negative aspects of bottled water accrue, its convenience is becoming less acceptable than taking a few minutes to prepare your own reusable bottle from the tap or filter.



Filtering systems

Jug filter

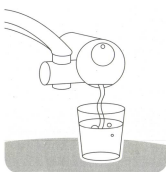


Pros Convenient, small, and easy to use and replace filters.

Cons Some are slow, prone to clogging and have short filter lives, meaning higher ongoing costs.

Price \$20-\$75

Tap mounted

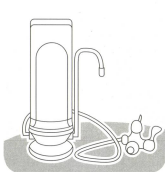


Pros Most convenient at-tap filter; small and easy to use and replace filters. Easy to swap between filtered and non-filtered water.

Cons Slows the flow of water and cannot be used on all taps.

Price \$25-\$75

Countertop

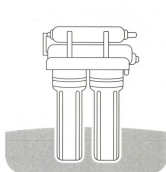


Pros Filters large amounts of water without plumbing modification. Less likely to clog than jug- or tap-mounted filters.

Cons Clutters countertops and cannot be used on all taps.

Price \$60-\$350

Under-sink



Pros Filters large amounts of water without cluttering the countertop, or attaching to existing tap. Less likely to clog than jug- or tap-mounted filters.

Cons Takes up space under the sink and requires plumbing modification. Most expensive option.

Price \$180-\$600

Filter technologies

All the filtering systems above can have different types or combinations of filter technologies. Base your decision on what additives you want to filter out.

Filtration/adsorption Filtration involves using a substance, typically carbon, to make contaminants adhere to its many pores, and is also called adsorption. The source of carbon can be coconut, charcoal, ceramic, and so on. This helps remove odour, taste and particles in the water.

Softeners If you have a hard-water source, you will notice a build-up in kettles, bathtubs and sinks. These are normally a result of large amounts of minerals in your water. A softener medium will reduce the amount of minerals.

UV Treatment This uses ultraviolet light to disinfect water, however it only works on relatively clear water, otherwise the light doesn't penetrate sufficiently.

Reverse-Osmosis Water under high pressure passes through a thin membrane, physically blocking and washing away most contaminants. It uses a lot of energy and water; up to 85% of the water can be wasted in the process. However, it does remove a wide range of contaminants.

Distillation This is also energy-intensive. Water is boiled, evaporates and the condensed water is collected, with many contaminants removed, although not all. >

When you turn on your tap, you should see clear, non-cloudy water. If not, or if it tastes strange, there are ways to find out why.

YOUR OWN WATER SUPPLY?

If you're not connected to town water, but use rain or bore water, it's important to inspect it regularly and protect your supply from contamination – particularly with bore water. Herbicides or fertilisers leaching into your supply, or an animal carcass close to the bore, can be a serious health threat. A dirty roof, lead flashing, peeling paint or bird droppings can affect the quality of collected rainwater.

Many water authorities or local health departments have brochures on what to look for and how to maintain a storage tank. Have your water supply tested regularly; contact your local or state health department. It may check the water body you're drawing from as part of its own monitoring program, or it can test your water – in many cases free of charge if you have a health concern. It will also be able to advise you on how to rectify a problem.





HOW WELL IS YOUR WATER?

Do a health check on your tap water by following these steps.

- If it looks, smells or tastes strange, or your sinks and toilets are stained by the tap water, use the table below to narrow down the possible causes.
- Check if your neighbours have the same issue, so you can find out if it's your plumbing or a general supply problem.
- Check with your water supplier, who may be able to quickly resolve any problems.
- Ask your water supplier to analyse a sample, preferably free of charge.
- Your supplier may be able to flush the mains pipes to solve any aesthetic concerns about the water.
- If you have damaged clothes as a result of staining from plumbing, you may be able to negotiate compensation from the supplier if it is at fault.

If you think you need to buy a water filter:

- Decide on what you need to filter out.
- Do the sums to estimate the system's initial and ongoing costs.
- Check whether the system you're considering has certification (right).
- CHOICE recommends a filter system only for colour/taste problems. For anything else, check the source and fix the problem there.

< Does it work?

How can you be sure filters do what they say? One thing to look for is certification. The NSF International provides a range of certifications for products that involve initial and periodic testing.

- **NSF 42** covers aesthetic effects such as chlorine, taste, odour and particles.
- **NSF 53** covers health effects, such as cysts (giardia, cryptosporidium), a range of organic chemicals (such as THM and pesticides) and heavy metals.

The Australian standard AS/NZS4348 covers a wide range of contaminants, such as taste, odour and microbiological and chemical impurities. There are also standards for water softeners (cation exchangers: NSF 44), reverse-osmosis (NSF 58) and distillation (NSF 62) systems. ■



Live safer.®

STANDARDS
Australia

The NSF International certifies a range of products, including water filters, to verify whether or not they do what they say.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

PROBLEM	SYMPTOM	POSSIBLE CAUSE
Stained plumbing and clothes	Red and brown	Iron
	Black	Manganese
	Green or blue	Copper
Reddish-brown slime in water and pipes	Slime	Iron (bacteria that feed on the iron cause the slime)
Off-colour water	Cloudy	Turbidity (fine suspended particles) (A)
	Black	Hydrogen sulphide, manganese
	Red	Iron
	Brown or yellow	Iron, humic and tannic acids
	Rotten egg	Hydrogen sulphide
Unusual taste or colour	Metallic	pH (acid-alkaline balance) is too low, iron, zinc, copper, lead
	Salty	Total dissolved solids, chloride
	Septic, musty, earthy	Bacteria or algae
	Bleach-like	Chlorine
	Deposits, pitting of plumbing	pH, copper, lead
Corrosive water		

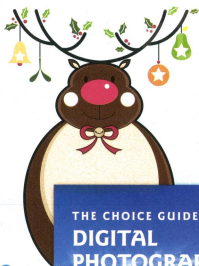
TABLE NOTES

Source: NSF International (www.nsf.org)

(A) Air bubbles may also cause water to be temporarily cloudy when it comes out of the tap.

Great Christmas gift ideas Order now!

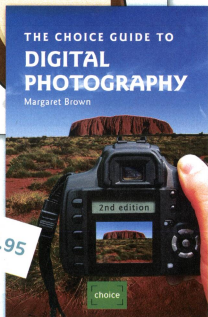
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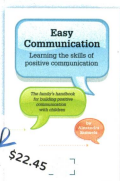
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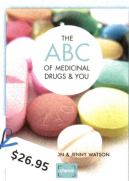
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Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Product Recalls Australia website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Product Safety Policy section of the ACCC on 02 6243 1262.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

FOOD ■ Coles has recalled **You'll love Coles Sliced Chicken Breast**, 2 x 50g plastic twin pack, with a best-before date of 07/10/08, sold in NSW, Queensland, SA and Victoria.

The problem It may contain *Listeria monocytogenes*, which can cause illness or miscarriage in pregnant women, or illness in young children, the elderly or people with a low immune system.

What to do Check your freezer for any affected product. Return it to any Coles, Bi-Lo or Pick 'n' Pay store for a refund, or for more information call 1800 061 562.

FOOD ■ Kasi Australia has recalled **Kirin Milk Tea**, 340mL can, with a best-before date of OCT/06/2009. It's a product of China, and was distributed in the ACT, NSW and Queensland.

The problem It may be contaminated with melamine.

What to do Don't drink it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

FOOD ■ McCain Foods has recalled **McCain Stir Fry Vegetables Pasta Alfredo with Sauce**, 600g poly bag, with a best-before date of 21/12/2009, and sold in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and WA.

The problem It may contain metal pieces.

What to do Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1800 065 521.

HAIR PRODUCTS ■ Continental Marketing has recalled the following **Godrej** and **Emami** hair products:

Godrej Coloursoft Liquid Hairdrye, 40mL, in natural black, natural brown, burgundy and light brown; Godrej Renew Hair Colour Cream, 50mL, in natural black, burgundy, light brown, dark mahogany, light golden brown, copper brown; Godrej Fashion Hair Colour in auburn red, natural dark brown; Emami Hair Instant Hair Pack, 70mL; Emami Mr Black Herbal Kesh Kala, 50mL in natural black; Emami Mrs Black Herbal Kesh Kala, 100mL, in natural black, and; Emami Fair and Ageless Cream, 60mL. They have been distributed through Indian ethnic grocery stores since September 2007.

The problem They don't meet the requirements of the Cosmetic Ingredient Labelling Regulations of the Trade Practices Act.

What to do Return them to the place of purchase for a refund.

HOT/COLD PACK ■ Tinsonax NSW has recalled **Medispot Soft Hot/Cold Packs**, medium size with the product number 2160, and large size with the product number 2161, ARTG number 149339.

The problem It contains the toxic substance ethylene glycol.

What to do Don't use it. Call 1800 079 937 to arrange for it to be returned and to obtain a refund.

HOT/COLD PACK ■ Blue Healer has recalled **Blue Healer Hot/Cold Reusable Ice Packs**, ARTG number 147709, regular and large size without bandage, and regular and large size with bandage.

The problem It contains the toxic substance ethylene glycol.

What to do Do not use them. Return to place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call (07) 5447 5579.

HOT/COLD PACK ■ Tyco Healthcare has recalled **Surgipack Soft Hot/Cold Pack**, large, product number 6230, ARTG number 99853, batch number 1055213.

The problem It contains the toxic substance ethylene glycol.

What to do Don't use it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call 1800 252 467.

HOT/COLD PACK ■ Orthopaedic Appliances has recalled **Soft Cold Hot Pack**, sold as OAPL Professional Reusable Hot and Cold Pack, ARTG number 130191.

The problem It contains the toxic substance ethylene glycol.

What to do Don't use it. Call 1800 033 207 to arrange for it to be returned and to obtain a refund.

HOT/COLD PACK ■ 3P has recalled **Surgical Basics Hot/Cold Pack**, small size, item number SB700, and large size, item number SB701, and **Soft R&R Hot/Cold Pack**, item number SB703, ARTG number 132987.

The problem They contain the toxic substance ethylene glycol.

What to do Don't use them. Call 02 4962 3822 or (02) 9232 7820 to arrange for them to be returned and to obtain a refund.

HOT/COLD PACKS ■ Westcoast Surgical and Medical Supplies has recalled **REDI Eye Mask, Full Face Mask, Face Mask, REDI Hot/Cold Pack – small dual colour, REDI Hot/Cold Pack with compression wrap – small dual colour, REDI Hot/Cold Pack, small PVC, and Frosty Bear REDI Hot/Cold Pack**, ARTG number 116111.

The problem They contain the toxic substance ethylene glycol.

What to do Don't use them. Call 08 9455 6676 to arrange for their return and to obtain a refund.

MOTOR VEHICLE ■ Ateco Automotive has recalled **Citroën C5 Vehicles** with a DW12 engine.

The problem The diesel return pipe fittings on the inlet manifold may become worn in the long term.

What to do Contact your nearest Citroën dealer to arrange for repair, or call 1800 804 707 for more information.

OCTOPUS STRAPS ■ Service Station Supplies has recalled **Octopus Straps**, a range of five octopus straps in sizes 18-, 24-, 30- and 36-inch with header cards branded SSA or MGR. The bar code numbers are SSA T18 – 9311902128312, SSA T24 – 9311902128329, SSA T30 – 9311902128338, SSA T36 – 9311902128343 and MGR T30 – 9311902128336. They were sold at automotive and convenience stores between 2004 and 2008.

The problem The compulsory warning label isn't of a permanent nature.

What to do Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

DRAWER KNOBS ■ IKEA has recalled sets of glass drawer knobs sold with the **IKEA KVIBY chest of drawers**. The affected drawers have a date stamp of 0817 or earlier, which can be found on the underside of the chest of drawers. It has been for sale at IKEA stores in NSW, Queensland and Victoria since 23 July 2007.

The problem The glass knobs may break, possibly causing injury.

What to do Visit the Exchanges and Returns department at your local IKEA store to receive a repair kit, or call the following numbers to have one posted to you: NSW 02 8002 0400, Queensland 07 3380 6800 or Victoria 03 8416 5000.

TOOTHPASTE/MOUTHWASH ■ Challenge International has recalled **Tri Leaf Total Care Toothpaste**, 145g, available since October 2005, **Tri Leaf 2 in 1 Toothpaste and Mouthwash Gel**, 120g, available since March 2003, and **Natural Bliss 2 in 1 Toothpaste and Mouthwash Gel**, 120g, available since March 2008.

The problem They contain a colour additive that is not declared in the ingredient list on the packaging.

What to do Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

VITAMINS ■ Blackmores has recalled **Blackmores Sustained Release C Tablets**, 200 pack, ARTG number 119710, batch numbers A7559-2 with an expiry date of 04/10, batch number A7958-2 with an expiry date of 04/10, and batch number A7959-2 with an expiry date of 02/10.

The problem Some bottles may contain Bio C chewable tablets.

What to do Contact Blackmores advisory service on 1800 803 760.

MOTOR VEHICLE ■ Ateco Automotive has recalled **Citroën C4 Picasso Vehicles**.

The problem The panoramic glass roof may become dislodged due to incorrect bonding.

What to do Contact your nearest Citroën dealer to arrange for repair, or call 1800 804 707 for more information.

+ CAMPAIGN SUCCESSES

Making a list, checking it twice

One year ago, CHOICE put forward our Top 10 list of consumer priorities for the new federal government (CHOICE, December 2007). Using our original wish list, here's how consumers fared.

GO 1 A fair go for consumer contracts
Everyday consumer contracts aren't always fair – such as when “standard terms” allow your mobile company to hike up the cost of your calls at any time without notice. The state and federal governments have announced they will introduce comprehensive legislation to outlaw unfair terms in consumer contracts.

GO 2 National product safety
Melamine contamination in imported Chinese milk products put product safety in the headlines, but every year about 750 Australians die as a result of product-safety related accidents. The state and federal governments have now agreed on a plan to implement a single national system of product safety, with greater enforcement powers for the ACCC. But to avoid problems like melamine contamination the law should go further – by putting a legal obligation on manufacturers and importers to ensure their products are safe.

GO 3 Loan sharks need not apply
Before we realised how badly reckless lending practices overseas would plunge the world into financial turmoil, CHOICE called for a crackdown on predatory lending and mortgage-broking practices here at home. The federal government has announced a new national credit regime which should tighten the rules.

4 Healthier kids, happier parents
We're closer than ever to cutting the glut of junk food marketing aimed at children, with Queensland, South Australia and the Greens declaring their support for tighter restrictions. The federal government has initiated many inquiries, but has yet to show its hand. Will 2009 be the year we eliminate this incredibly unhealthy and unhelpful influence? See www.choice.com.au/fedup.

GO 5 Healthy hospitals
How does your local hospital compare on rates of preventable infections or waiting times for elective surgery? Starting with the next round of funding agreements, public hospitals will have to publish key information on their performance – empowering patients and encouraging higher standards of care.



6 Efficiency begins at home
Water and energy use are major challenges for Australia's sustainable future and for consumers facing rising costs. CHOICE asked all governments to play a greater role in promoting better efficiency in the home. We're encouraged at the steps they took this year, but there's more to be done. For information on consuming sustainably and reducing energy costs, visit www.choice.com.au/green.



7 Promotion overdo\$e
When doctors have to rely on drug marketing reps to stay up to date, we start to worry. CHOICE brought concerns to light with an investigation into drug marketing (see www.choice.com.au/pushingpills) and our campaign continues.



8 New broadband – the not-so-super highway
CHOICE cautioned against rushing ahead with a new national broadband system without public consultation or the guarantee of competitive, fairly priced access. We still fear a deal that delivers substandard broadband at considerable cost.



9 Unfair bank penalty fees – enough already
After years of soaring charges, every financial institution in Australia has now reduced its penalty fees and many have been eliminated outright. The government, however, has yet to crack down. Learn more and see how your bank's charges compare on our campaign website: www.fairfees.com.au.



10 Yes, Minister!
We've had ministers to look after just about everything except consumers' interests. CHOICE was delighted when the new government appointed the first-ever federal Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, Chris Bowen.

There's always more work to do, but it's been a year of significant progress and promise. Talk to us about the issues you want CHOICE to campaign on at www.choice.com.au/campaigns, or write to us at campaigns@choice.com.au. Here's to 2009! ■

Real-world computing advice



In the latest issue



Home theatre projectors Bring the movies to you! We put eight high-definition projectors to the test.



Email scams What to watch out for - your best defence against them.



Games consoles The great showdown - which is best for you?



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Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, unbolded type indicates other articles.

* Indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls.

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